

Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care

Derbyshire County Council Adult Social Care publishes a range of practice guidance documents to support workers managing individual cases. They are written in plain language and give clear and precise guidance detailing how professionals and other relevant parties should respond when supporting adults.

This document contains practice guidance of relevance when working with people with dual sensory loss/deafblind. Other practice guidance relating to sensory disability is available separately for working with:

- [People with a Hearing Impairment](#)
- [People with a Visual Impairment](#)

This document will be reviewed on a regular basis – if you would like to make any comments, amendments, additions etc. please email ASCH.AdultCare.Policy@derbyshire.gov.uk

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Sensory Competences for Community Social Work Teams.....	4
3. Legislative Framework - Specific Relevance to Sensory Disability	5
4. Working with People who have a Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind	6
5. Booking an Interpreter and Communication Unlimited	8
6. Useful Resources.....	9
Appendix 1. Dual Sensory Loss Quiz.....	10
Author History	11

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
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1. Introduction

The following information is for people who work, or plan to work, with people who have dual sensory loss/deafblind.

The Care Act 2014 has stated that people who have dual sensory loss are only to be assessed by suitably qualified practitioners.

Assessments should be appropriate and proportionate. When meeting care needs of people with a dual sensory loss, attention needs to be given for care to be appropriate and may require specialist services.

Derbyshire County Council (DCC) have invested in training of nominated colleagues across the county with each area having a deafblind representative.

A Derbyshire sensory group meets every two months. Chosen representatives (reps) are expected to attend the meetings. The meetings are run by an experienced sensory social worker in the south of Derbyshire and the senior practitioner for deaf and sensory work. Reps from DCC and the Visual Impairment Rehabilitation teams, along with people working in the voluntary sector, attend the meetings.

The meetings have a standing agenda item to discuss deafblind assessments where ideas and good practice are shared. The Derbyshire sensory reps can receive advice and support for their assessments from the group and the leaders.

The recommended practice is that area reps will undertake the deafblind specialist assessment, however, if they find the case is complicated in any way they will refer the case into the Deaf Services team who have undertaken extra specialist training and are experts in the needs of people who are deafblind.

DCC have a rehabilitation officer provided under contract with Sight Support Derbyshire. The rehabilitation officers work with people who have a sight loss and have a specialist deafblind rehabilitation officer.

Communication Unlimited (CU) is the DCC interpreter service, providing interpreters for the deaf community and deafblind interpreters.

Communication Unlimited:

01332 369920

Text 07812300280

Fax 01332 369459

Minicom 01332 369435.

Email: comunli@aol.com

This practice guidance aims to give you some idea of what you need to address when working with someone who has dual sensory loss/deafblind and will support you in developing the competencies required in this area of work.

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
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This should be complemented with further professional development and training available from independent reading and Adult Social Care Training section.

It is recommended practitioners take time to invest in internet searches and/or visit local voluntary agencies.

The fact that hearing can be used to compensate partly for poor sight, and sight can greatly assist people with poor hearing, demonstrates some of the challenges facing deafblind people.

People with visual and hearing problems receive ‘imperfect’ or unclear sensory information. Some people may not have a ‘visual memory’ because they have always been blind or partially sighted. Others may never have heard most of the sounds around them and so are unable to work out their meaning. They may also need time to consider how to react.

A working description used for ‘deafblind’ (used interchangeably with dual sensory loss) guiding our work with this group of people is:

“Persons are regarded as deafblind if their combined sight and hearing impairment cause difficulties with communication, access to information and mobility. This includes people with a progressive sight and hearing loss”

(Think Dual Sensory,3 Department of Health, 1995).

“Deaf blindness can be found in all age groups, including children, but the incidence is greatest in older adults.”

Page 4, Local Authority Circular- LAC(DH)(2009)6

DCC has a specialist Deaf Services team to refer to for information, advice, and guidance at any time. DCC has a statutory responsibility to provide services and to adjust the environment and the way it carries out its duties, including considering altering its practice in light of any forthcoming best practice guidelines or legislation which underpins the rights and needs of people with sensory impairments.

The accessible information standard aims to ensure people who have a disability, impairment, or sensory loss can obtain information they can easily read or understand with support. All organisations providing adult social care or NHS care must follow the accessible information standard. DCC Adult Social Care Accessible Information Policy is available [here](#).

Everyone needs to take individual responsibility to provide an inclusive and equal environment for all the people with whom they become involved.

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
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2. Sensory Competences for Community Social Work Teams

Generic community social work teams are responsible for assessment and any on-going casework that may be required to meet the assessed eligible adult social care and support needs of all local people in their area.

The competences for the level 3 qualification in Deafblind assessment outline the basic standard of knowledge and expertise community social work teams need to be able to provide the required standard of service response for local people with a sensory loss. These include capability to access relevant specialist services, signposting, information and advice, as well as sound ability to provide direct assistance when required. Whilst these competencies are separated out into hearing or visual impairment, achieving these competencies is clearly crucial when working with people with a combination of both sight and hearing loss (dual sensory loss).

Achieving the basic accessible information standard is a professional development responsibility for individual practitioners as well as a collective team responsibility. This should be addressed through professional supervision and my plan, as well as team development work. Relevant specialist technical support will be provided by the Deaf Services team to support professional practice development where this is needed.

Knowledge of Hearing Impairment – Impact and Scope for Support

The following should be considered when undertaking an assessment:

1. Personal social and psychological implications – learning from “experts by experience.”
2. Audiology, including:
 - care pathway for people pre and post appointment at audiology departments within local health services
 - how hearing aids work, telecoil, loop systems
 - equipment knowledge
3. Assistive animal support e.g. Hearing dogs, dual sensory dogs.
4. Sensory pathway within adult social care services.
5. Voluntary sector services and organisations providing specialist support – who’s who in the local area.
6. Completion of assessment for people with sensory impairment and where the provision of a personal budget is the result, how to set up a simple direct payment for sensory equipment.
7. Welfare benefits - including completing claim forms – that can assist people with a pronounced hearing loss.
8. Support groups and universal offer – self run groups in the local area.

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
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9. Advocacy services including Derby and Chesterfield law centres.

Knowledge of Sight Impairment – Impact and Scope for Support

The following should be considered when undertaking an assessment:

1. Personal social and psychological implications - learning from “experts by experience.”
2. Some understanding of sight loss by undertaking the provided training in-house or the one delivered by [Sight Support Derbyshire](#).
3. Dual sensory loss - definition and how specialist support is accessed and what support is available locally.
4. Low vision aid assessments - what they are and where you get one.
5. Assistive animal support available.
6. Voluntary sector services and organisations, including the community volunteer service (CVS).
7. Completion of assessment for people with sight impairment and where the provision of a personal budget is the result, how to set up a simple direct payment for sensory equipment.
8. Welfare benefits including completing claim forms – who can assist people with sight impairment.
9. Support groups and universal offer – self run groups in the local area.
10. Sight registration - how it happens and the benefits for people who do register.
11. VIP (visually impaired person) days (provided for people newly registered and their carers) – what they are and how are they accessed.
12. Advocacy services including Derby and Chesterfield law centres.

3. Legislative Framework - Specific Relevance to Sensory Disability

Local authorities' functions relating to provision of care and support for adults are set out in [Part 1 of the Care Act 2014](#). This replaced local authority responsibilities for adults previously contained in the [National Assistance Act 1948](#) and the [Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 \(CSDPA 1970\)](#), both of which had considerable reference specifically to supporting disabled people. (The CSDPA 1970 still applies to children).

Under [Section 77 of the Care Act 2014](#) and its associated regulations provide that we must keep a register of people who are sight impaired (SI) and severely sight impaired (SSI).

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
---	---	--

Additionally, [Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014](#) introduces a new statutory framework for local authorities and clinical commissioning groups, to work together to secure services for children and young people (up to the age of 25) who have special educational needs (SEN) or a disability, including a new statutory code of practice which provides guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to meeting their needs.

The Equality Act 2010

The act protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.

It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. It sets out the different ways in which it's unlawful to treat someone.

For more information visit [the Equality Act 2010 Guidance](#) and also <http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/council/equalities/>

If you want to find out more about legislation search the web or join the departmental 'Community of Practice – Sensory' Group. See '[Useful Resources](#)' for details.

4. Working with People who have a Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind

People who have a dual sensory loss have a distinct impairment that is more than simply vision loss and hearing loss. It is a unique impairment with specific impacts on the lives of individuals. The difficulties created in communication, in mobility, and in access to information from the environment can be considerable. The way a person will cope with an added sensory loss will be significantly different from how they have coped with a single sensory loss.

“Blindness cuts you off from things but deafness cuts you off from people”

(Helen Keller, who was deafblind all her life and communicated via her support worker Ann Sullivan).

It is important to be aware of the difference between 'congenital' and 'acquired' deafblindness. An acquired loss may be as a result of a genetic condition (e.g. usher) an injury, illness, trauma or accident, or may be age related.

The deafblind community, can in the main, be divided into four main groups:

1. A person who loses both sight and hearing in adult life. This group will probably communicate orally but may learn to use tactile communication deafblind manual (a form on hands-on sign language).
2. A person who is blind may have Braille skills and who subsequently loses their hearing, will probably communicate orally, but may learn to use deafblind manual.
3. Congenitally deaf people who lose their sight in later life. This group will move from visual British Sign Language (BSL) to a hands-on manual using BSL.

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
---	---	--

4. Congenitally deafblind people would probably use tactile communication and braille. Groups one and two may be older people who lose sight and hearing with advancing years. Within this group there are people who will have a partial vision and hearing loss. This can be as isolating and difficult to cope with as profound loss. The impact of a dual sensory loss will vary according to the individual. It is significantly complex and above all, extremely isolating.

People who are blind or visually impaired are taught to use their hearing to make sense of the world. By listening carefully and remembering what others have said, blind and partially sighted people may develop a wide range of coping strategies. Alternatively, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, who are dependent upon their vision, may receive education and training to live successfully in a world filled with people with 'ordinary' hearing.

It is not a question of just adding two disabilities together, dual sensory loss should be recognised as a separate disability.

Everyone is responsible for ensuring services are accessible. If you are working with a person who has a dual sensory loss you will need assistance to meet their needs.

Contact the Deaf Services team for advice. This is necessary if you are trying to access a personal budget for a deafblind person. You need to be able to look at each question of your assessment and adjust the response to include the impact of a dual sensory loss. For example, just think how you would begin to move out of your home when you can see and hear very little. How can you participate in life activities? Human beings need communication to survive and reach positive life goals/outcomes, so address this need in the assessment?

It is strongly recommended you find further information via the Web – see '[Useful Resources](#)'.

If you do find yourself working with someone who has dual sensory loss consider the use of a communicator guide who will use a method of communication appropriate to the individual's requirements. For example, communication may be via 'hands on' signing, or via an interpreter using BSL/Sign Supported English (SSE) within the person's visual frame. Visual frame simply means within the sight the person has, maybe tunnel vision.

A communicator guide will be aware of all the communication methods and will also act as a guide/aid to assist the person to walk around safely.

Remember:

- you will need time to give the person you are working with the support they need to participate in communicating with you - communication may be extremely difficult
- there may be one to one support available, such as a 'communicator guide', the Deaf Services team can tell you more - or you may find it helpful to assist with communication to use a service from Communication Unlimited - see section below on '[how to book an interpreter](#)'
- isolation is a major factor and if not acknowledged and addressed by you, could lead to poor mental health
- group activities need to be carefully amended to allow the person

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
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you are working with to participate

- often it is impossible for people with a dual sensory loss to participate, if this is the case then do not continue to offer this, but do not isolate them - change the activity
- if you have been working with someone for a long time you will need to consider your training needs
- ensure the client record system (MOSAIC) record identifies the person you are working with as having a dual impairment
- if you are undertaking an assessment of someone with a dual sensory loss who seems to be struggling to follow or understand you, stop immediately and try to identify the barrier to communication
- is the room/environment right?
- are you speaking clearly and at a steady pace?
- are equipment/hearing aids being used which need adjusting?
- do you need a personal listener?
- make sure large print is used if this is required
- take the time to adjust your practice or you are in danger of denying freedom of choice, if necessary, book another appointment
- a person can be 'labelled' as having dementia or severe behavioral problems and end up in an inappropriate service if the effect of a dual sensory loss is not considered

For example, a person with a dual sensory loss was discharged from hospital to a residential placement. In the move they lost their hearing aids. They had very little sight and relied very much on their hearing aids to receive all their communication. The person became extremely distressed and would shout hour after hour, they became incontinent and spent their time rocking backwards and forwards. This person was said to require a specialist placement. However, a member of the Deaf Services team, who was just by chance visiting the home, recognised the person. The worker quickly established that the person's hearing aids were lost and this was why they were shouting all the time, they also realised the person's sight loss had not been addressed, and no one had shown them where the toilets or bathrooms were.

As soon as new hearing aids were made available the person was able to communicate and said they had no idea where they were or why! After they had calmed down and used the bathroom, they were able to contribute to their own care and support planning process.

IF IN DOUBT ASK FOR SUPPORT.

5. Booking an Interpreter and Communication Unlimited

DCC has a contract with Communication Unlimited to provide interpreter support for deaf people and so they should always be the first organisation approached for assistance. The service is free to deafblind people; however, the service is very stretched and interpreters are

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
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in short supply. Therefore, it is very important to be aware that time is needed to book an interpreter. Support can be made available to assist with lip reading with Communication Unlimited for deafblind people and they will also provide Sign Language interpreters for BSL users.

To book an interpreter contact Communication Unlimited:

Voice: 01332 369920
Minicom: 01332 369435
SMS: 07904 038457
Email bookings@cu-bsl.co.uk

If a Communications Unlimited interpreter is not available and you are looking for an interpreter from a private company the best way is to look for a service via the internet or contact the Deaf Services team for advice.

Further information is available on [Our Derbyshire](#)

6. Useful Resources

‘Community of Practice – Sensory’ Group

This group consists of colleagues who can support you to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence in working with people with sensory impairments. It consists of both DCC employees and voluntary sector representatives. The group is open to all. For further details and to find out about the learning sets/road shows, please contact Tracie.Bonnici@derbyshire.gov.uk or deafteam@derbyshire.gov.uk

(The following details are correct on going to print but are subject to change over time please contact Tracie.Bonnici@derbyshire.gov.uk or deafteam@derbyshire.gov.uk)

Local Organisations

The ‘[Derbyshire Directory](#)’ holds information on a wide range of local groups and organisations that meet regularly with a number of common interests and activities as well as providing mutual support. This directory can be accessed via Derbyshire’s [public website](#).

Some National Organisations

- [Deafblind UK](#)
- [Sense](#)

Remember, all the people we have referred to here are people with a disability. All people with a disability are protected under Equality duty. It is *YOUR* responsibility under equality legislation to adjust your practice to include all. It is *YOUR* responsibility to have in place communication support and to provide information in the required accessible format.

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
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Appendix 1. Dual Sensory Loss Quiz

A short quiz - answers are found by reading above!

1. What is a dual sensory loss?
2. How do you record that a person has a dual sensory loss?
3. What government guidelines specifically relate to people who have a dual sensory loss (deafblind)?
4. What do the above guidelines require you to do?
5. Who can assist you to undertake a dual sensory loss assessment?
6. What is a communicator guide?
7. How/who will a communicator guide help?
8. What is 'Hands on Signing'?
9. What is the Equality Duty and what are your responsibilities?
10. What is the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act and what are your responsibilities?
11. How do you contact the Derbyshire Deaf Services team for assistance with your assessment?

Version: 3 FOI Status: Public	Working with Adults with Dual Sensory Loss/Deafblind Practice Guidance Derbyshire County Council - Adult Social Care	Originally Issued: January 2014 V3 Issued: February 2022 Review Due: February 2024 Author: Tracie Bonnici
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Author History

Authorisation and Approval History

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Approved by Quality Assurance Group	September 2017
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Version 1 January 2014 Sue Mitchell/Jenny Hudson	Development of 4 new practice guidance documents to replace 'Sensory Disability Manual'
Version 2 September 2017 Sue Mitchell	Review and update to reflect current practice
Version 3 February 2022 Tracie Bonnici	Review and update to reflect current practice