

What would a great community equipment loan service look like?

What citizens told us

**Strategy & Integration
Commissioning
Adult Social Care & Health**

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Executive summary

- Questionnaires were completed with 62 citizens in Birmingham to gather their views on what makes a good community equipment service.
- A small majority of respondents (53%) had experience of getting equipment through a community equipment loans service for themselves or someone that they cared for.
- A small majority of respondents (57%) had previously purchased community equipment for themselves or somebody that they cared for.
- When asked where they would go for equipment if they needed it, the top suggestions from citizens were: GP; occupational therapist; social care; NHS bodies such as hospitals or rehabilitation clinics; and self-purchase.
- Citizens gave a number of reasons for previously self-purchasing community equipment, including: a greater choice and range of equipment available; a quicker and easier process; negative experience of community equipment loans services; and not being aware of the loans service.
- Views were collected on all aspects of a community equipment loans service and what makes a 'good community equipment loans service':
 - **Delivery of equipment:** a speedy and reliable service; time slots; good communication at all stages of the process; staff attitude and behaviour; correct equipment received in good condition.
 - **Fitting and installation:** qualified staff with good attitude and behaviour; a good quality fitting; a quick and reliable service; clear communication and information provided to citizens.
 - **Repairs:** equipment repaired or replaced as needed; repairs carried out as quickly as possible; being kept informed at all stages.
 - **Customer service:** staff having key attitudes, skills and behaviours; easy to contact; clear processes; issues resolved quickly; no automated telephone systems.
- Respondents gave their suggestions for how people could be encouraged to return equipment when it was no longer needed. Suggestions included: collecting equipment from homes; collecting equipment more quickly; making it easier to contact the service; and specific innovations such as deposits and labels on equipment.
- Citizens also fed back on the need to further publicise community equipment loan services, the range of equipment available, and how to access the service.

1. Introduction

Birmingham has an integrated community equipment loan service which is jointly funded by NHS Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group (BSol CCG) and Birmingham City Council (BCC). This is currently delivered through an external provider.

The community equipment loan service provides equipment to citizens who require equipment to assist with everyday tasks and live independently at home. This can range from simple mobility aids, such as crutches and walking frames, to more complex and expensive items such as profiling beds and hoists. Items are provided free of charge, on loan or single issue, to people of all ages who meet the agreed criteria.

The provision of community equipment to adults and children enables independent living, facilitates patient discharge from hospital and can contribute to reducing overall costs in the health and social care system.

The current contract for delivering the service is due to expire in 2019 and commissioners in BSol CCG and BCC are working together to determine what is needed in a new Birmingham Community Equipment Loan Service (BCELS). As part of this process, we have spoken to people across Birmingham to gather their views on what makes a great community equipment loan service, using a specially developed questionnaire to explore all aspects of service delivery.

This report summarises our findings from this questionnaire and sets out how we are going to use this information to inform the commissioning process for the new BCELS.

2. Methodology

2.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed by the commissioning team with questions covering previous experiences of community equipment and all aspects of the community equipment loans service process, from ordering to recycling. Due to the short timescale, and the need to ensure that views from older adults were captured, it was decided that the questionnaire would not be put online but would instead be administered in person with citizens across Birmingham at specially selected sites.

Members of the commissioning team were trained on how to administer the questionnaire with citizens, and a visual 'prompt' sheet was designed with pictures of examples of community equipment to help citizens understand what types of equipment are included.

Questionnaires were administered between 24 May and 12 July 2018 at the following locations:

- Ageing Well in Birmingham Citizen Event, Birmingham City Football Club
- Perry Tree Centre, Kingstanding
- Hagley Road Extra Care Village, Edgbaston
- West Midlands Rehabilitation Centre, Selly Oak
- Victoria College, Northfield

In total, 62 questionnaires were completed with citizens.

2.2 Analysis

Completed versions of the questionnaire were manually input onto Birmingham Be Heard (Birmingham City Council's consultation database), to facilitate easier data storage and analysis.

2.2.1 Quantitative analysis

Closed questions were coded according to a predetermined coding structure. Survey responses were extracted from Birmingham Be Heard and entered onto an Excel database for analysis. The findings are reported in section 3.

2.2.2 Qualitative analysis

Survey responses to open text questions were extracted from Birmingham Be Heard and entered onto an Excel database for analysis.

The qualitative analysis was undertaken in several stages. Comments to each question were considered and manually coded. Themes were then identified from the coded data to inform the key findings. A check on the reliability of the process was undertaken by a second analyst who reviewed the results for a sample of respondents.

The findings are reported in section 3.

2.3 Survey limitations

The questionnaire was administered using a 'convenience sample' of citizens in Birmingham – that is, respondents were not specially selected to reflect the demography of the city, but were identified based on their attendance at one of the locations listed above. This means that there is a risk that responses may not reflect the views of everybody in Birmingham, however this risk was mitigated by ensuring that a variety of sites were visited at different times and on different days. Comparing survey results with other methods of data collection, including a survey carried out with community equipment prescribers, suggests that all significant themes were captured.

The structure and format of the questionnaire meant all respondents were adults over 18 years old. Results therefore do not directly include the views of children or young people, however the views of parents were captured to cover some of the main issues affecting children and young people accessing the community equipment loan service.

3. Key findings

Questionnaires were completed with 62 citizens. Key findings from the questionnaire are set out below.

Q1. If you, or someone you care for, needed equipment to help with everyday tasks where would you go for it?

All 62 respondents answered this question. Eight respondents (13%) stated that they didn't know where they would get community equipment if they needed it. The remaining 54 respondents gave multiple suggestions for where they would go to get equipment.

Category	No. of respondents	% of respondents
Buy it myself	6	10%
Community equipment loan service	2	3%
Internet	3	5%
Local authority - social care	8	13%
Local authority - other	2	3%
Named/identified provider of community equipment	2	3%
NHS - district nurse	4	6%
NHS - GP	15	24%
NHS - occupational therapist	11	18%
NHS - physiotherapist	4	6%
NHS – other (<i>including hospital, rehabilitation clinic</i>)	7	11%
School	3	5%
Misc. (<i>including Careline, support groups</i>)	13	21%
I don't know	8	13%
N/A	3	5%

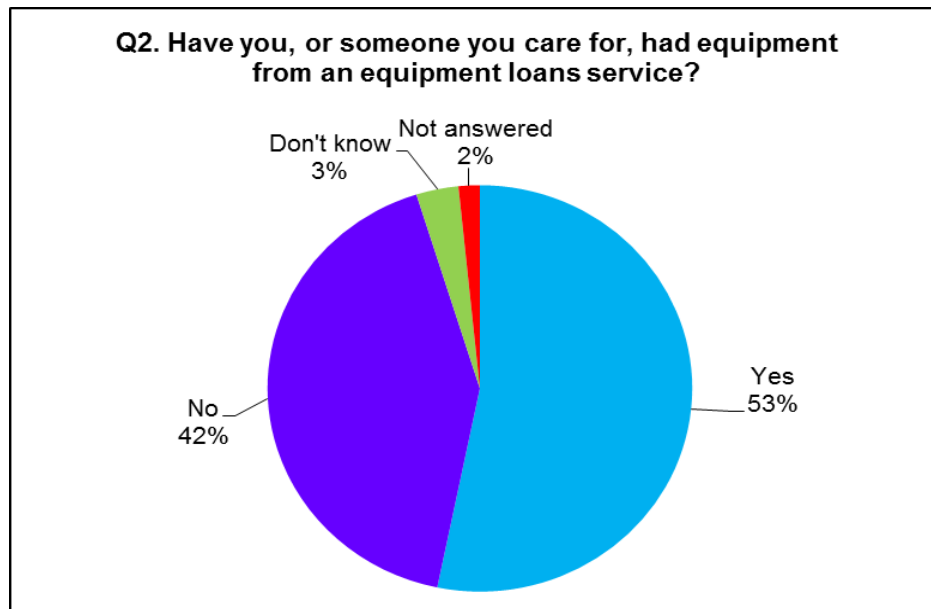
Excluding 'I don't know' and 'non applicable' answers, the five most common suggestions for where to get community equipment were:

Category	No. of respondents	% of respondents
NHS - GP	15	24%
NHS – occupational therapist	11	18%
Local authority – social care	8	13%
NHS - other	7	11%
Buy it myself	6	10%

Only two respondents (3%) stated that they would go to community equipment loan services for equipment if they needed it. However it is unclear whether this is due to a lack of awareness of the service or whether respondents had first-hand experience of the referral process for community equipment services, which can only be accessed following a clinical assessment.

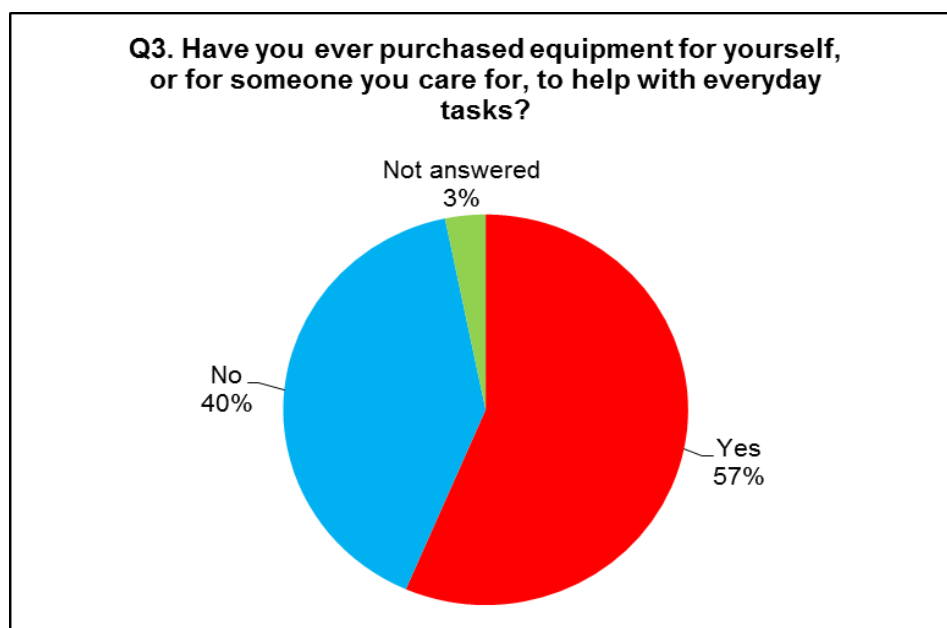
Q2. Have you, or someone you care for, had equipment from an equipment loans service?

Respondents to the questionnaire were slightly more likely to have experience of community equipment loan services, with 53% saying that they, or someone they cared for, had received equipment from a loan service. One respondent did not answer this question.



Q3. Have you ever purchased equipment for yourself or for someone you care for to help with everyday tasks?

57% of citizens completing the questionnaire had purchased equipment for themselves or somebody that they cared for.



Q3.b) Why did you purchase equipment rather than get it from a community equipment loans service?

26 respondents did not answer this question (25 of these had not purchased equipment so the question was not applicable to their experiences).

36 respondents did answer this question, with many giving multiple reasons for purchasing rather than borrowing community equipment. In total, 36 respondents gave 48 reasons why they had purchased equipment.

Reasons for purchasing equipment fell into three broad categories:

- Positive reasons for purchasing rather than borrowing equipment
- Previous negative experience of community equipment loan services
- A lack of awareness of community equipment services

Positive (active) reasons for purchasing rather than borrowing equipment

Many respondents had actively chosen to purchase their own equipment without having prior experience of loan services. Key reasons given for purchasing equipment included:

- More choice (range of equipment available/being able to choose specific items)
- Better quality equipment
- Being able to afford to buy equipment
- Quicker to buy equipment

Other respondents indicated that ownership of equipment was important to them, or that they had bought extra equipment to 'supplement' the equipment they had received on loan (for example, a lightweight wheelchair to use on holiday to go alongside the standard wheelchair available).

Previous negative experience of community equipment loan services

Some respondents had purchased community equipment because they had previous negative experiences of loans services. Key themes included:

- Previously loaned equipment that had repeatedly broken down
- Loan service being too slow
- Loan service being unreliable

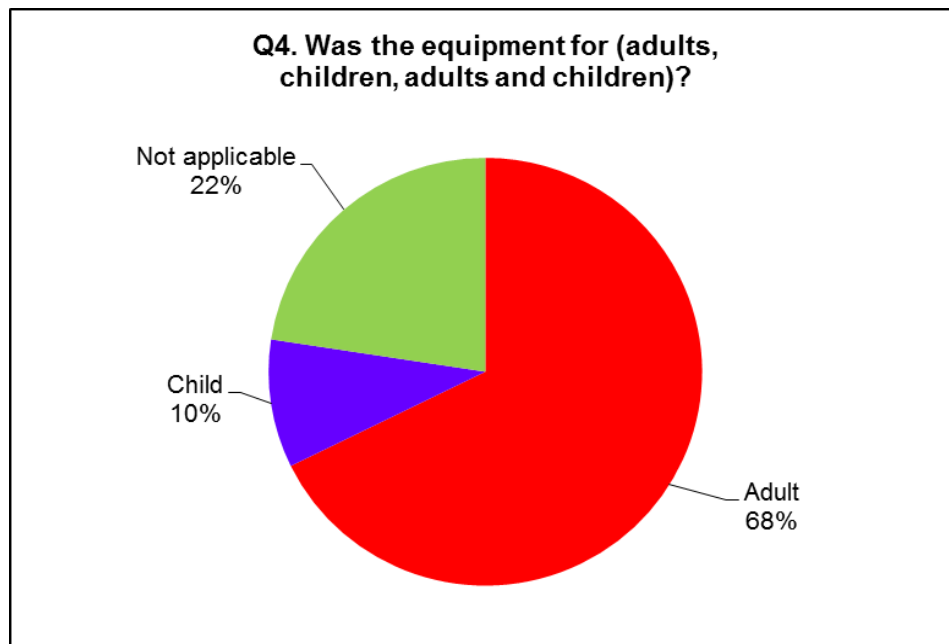
A lack of awareness of community equipment services

A significant proportion of respondents to this question had bought equipment because they were either unaware that community equipment loan services existed (9 respondents), or were not aware of the range of types of equipment that could be borrowed (6 respondents).

Q4. Was the equipment for (adults, children, adults and children)?

Thirteen respondents (22%) did not answer this question as they had no experience of purchasing or borrowing equipment to help with everyday tasks.

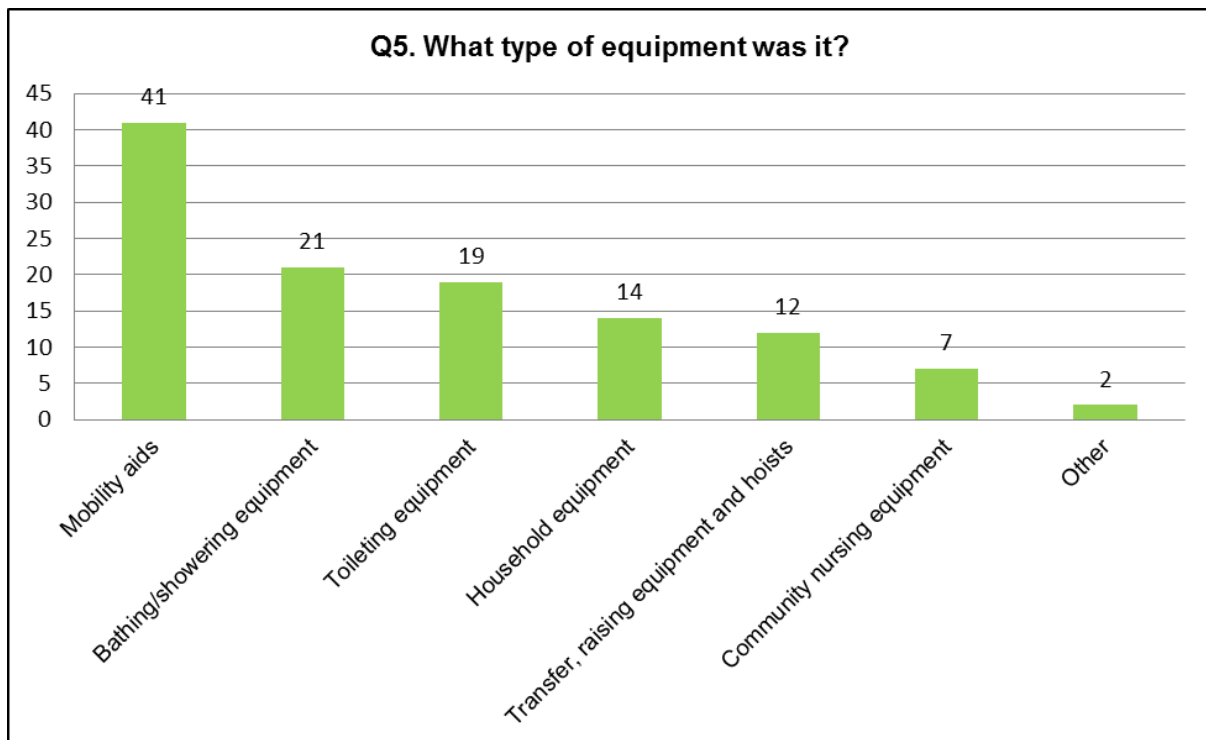
A significant majority of respondents (68%) had purchased or borrowed equipment for an adult.



Q5. What type of equipment was it?

There was a wide range in the types of equipment that people had bought or loaned to help with everyday tasks.

49 respondents had borrowed or purchased community equipment. The most common type of equipment used were mobility aids, with 41 respondents stating that they had bought or loaned these.



Q6. What do you think a good delivery service should offer?

Every respondent answered this question, with 60 respondents providing 119 suggestions for what made a good delivery service (two respondents stated that they 'did not know').

Key themes included:

- Speed and reliability of service
- Importance of communication
- Staff attitude and behaviour
- Condition of equipment

Speed and reliability of service

The majority of suggestions focused on the importance of speed and reliability in a delivery service. A significant proportion of respondents wanted to be given specific time slots for delivery, while others simply wanted deliveries to be made on time. Citizens also wanted a quick service, with equipment delivered promptly. Many respondents emphasised that speed and reliability was particularly important when delivering community equipment, as it was vital medical equipment that was often needed urgently.

Other suggestions included providing a choice of delivery dates and/or times, ensuring that equipment was delivered to the right address and having a safe process where delivery staff understood the importance of having identification when attending someone's home.

Importance of communication

Citizens expected a good delivery service to keep customers informed at every stage of the process, providing updates on any issues and when equipment could be expected to provider. A small number of respondents also highlighted that they would want a service that was easy to contact in case of any issues.

Staff attitude and behaviour

A significant number of respondents gave suggestions regarding the attitude and behaviour of delivery staff, stating that this was an important aspect of a good delivery service. They wanted staff that were polite, professional and willing to provide extra assistance where necessary, for example helping to unpack and set up equipment, or ensuring that equipment was into the right place before leaving.

Condition of equipment

Some respondents said the condition of equipment, once delivered, was an important consideration for them. They wanted the correct equipment to be delivered, in good condition.

Q7. What would you expect from a good fitting/installation service?

61 respondents (98%) answered this question. Of these, four stated that they did not know what they would expect from a good fitting and installation service. The remaining 57 respondents gave 113 suggestions.

Key themes included:

- The attitude, behaviour and qualifications of staff
- The quality of the fitting/installation
- The efficiency of the process
- Communication and provision of information

The attitude, behaviour and qualifications of staff

Citizens saw the attitude, behaviour and qualifications of staff as important aspects of a good fitting and installation service. Staff should be fully qualified to carry out their roles and happy to demonstrate and test equipment with citizens once it was installed, to ensure that it was fitted correctly and that citizens knew how to use it safely.

The quality of the fitting/installation

Respondents emphasised the importance of having a good quality fitting/installation, with no mess left behind and fittings personalised to individual customers.

The efficiency of the process

Many respondents gave suggestions regarding the processes that would enable and support a good fitting and installation service. They wanted a quick and reliable service, with some respondents wanting specific time slots for when work would be carried out rather than a whole day slot.

Communication and provision of information

Communication and provision of information was a key theme. Citizens expected that a good service would communicate well, keeping them updated and informed throughout the whole process. They wanted instructions to be left after the fitting so that citizens knew how to use the equipment, with a contact number provided in case of any issues or concerns.

Q8. What would you expect a good repair service to look like?

61 respondents (98%) answered this question. Of these, four people said that they did not know what they expected from a good repair service. The remaining 57 people gave 107 suggestions for what would make a good repair service.

Key themes included:

- Repair or replacement of equipment
- Speed and efficiency of process
- Importance of communication

Repair or replacement of equipment

Citizens expected that a good repair service would ensure that equipment was repaired to a high standard, and that replacement equipment would be provided if a repair was not possible. Many respondents would also expect a 'courtesy' replacement item to be provided until the repair could take place.

Speed and efficiency of process

There was an emphasis on speed and efficiency, with many respondents expecting that a good repair service would carry out repairs on equipment as quickly as possible. They wanted to have appointment times arranged in advance so that they knew when equipment would be repaired, and to have a reliable service that was on time for appointments.

Importance of communication

Respondents placed importance on good communication and the provision of information throughout the repair process. They wanted a service that kept them informed throughout with staff that had a good attitude and proactively provided information to citizens, as well as being easy to contact (either to report a fault or get updates on a requested repair).

Q9. What do you think would help people to return borrowed equipment promptly?

55 respondents (88%) answered this question. Five people didn't have any suggestions for how to encourage people to return borrowed equipment. The remaining 50 respondents gave 96 suggestions, which could be grouped into three areas:

- Process
- Customer service
- Specific suggestions for improvement or innovation

Process

Some responses concerned the process for returning borrowed equipment and what features would encourage people to return equipment. The majority of responses identified that a collections service, whereby the community equipment loans service collected equipment from people's homes, would work better than a returns system where people had to take back equipment themselves. They went on to say that collections should be made quickly, especially when there had been a bereavement, and that it might help if collections could be arranged in advance.

Where people did return equipment, there should be a clear process for doing so.

Customer service

Respondents stated that being able to contact the service easily would encourage people to return equipment.

Specific suggestions for improvement or innovation

The majority of respondents gave suggestions for specific innovations or improvements that they felt would improve equipment return rates.

Innovation/improvement	No. of respondents
Labels on equipment with service/contact information	10
Deposits paid on equipment, repaid on return	10
Charges for equipment that is not returned	4
Information provided to citizens about why equipment should be returned (such as a leaflet)	4
Proactive management of equipment by the service e.g. improved record keeping, sending reminder letters to citizens, periodically checking the location of equipment	4
Trackers on equipment	2

Other suggestions made include:

- Providing a credit when equipment is returned
- Signing a contract when receiving equipment
- Delivering and collecting equipment at the same time (exchanging old for new)
- Training staff to emphasise at all stages of the process that equipment must be returned

Q10. What do you think a good customer service would be like?

55 respondents (88%) answered this question. Of these, three stated that they did not know what they thought good customer service looked like. The remaining 52 respondents gave a total of 117 suggestions for good customer service.

Themes included:

- The attitude and behaviour of staff
- The customer service process
- Communication systems

The attitude and behaviour of staff

The majority of responses focused on the specific attitudes, behaviours and skills that were necessary for staff working in customer service. These could be grouped together into the following requirements for staff:

- Knowledgeable
- Polite and professional
- Friendly and caring
- Good communication and listening skills
- Responsible and reliable – ‘doing what they say they will’
- Helpful and positive

Respondents were also clear that they wanted to speak to as few people as possible when they contacted the service – they didn’t want to be passed around multiple members of staff, but wanted someone to take responsibility for solving their issue as soon as possible.

The customer service process

Some respondents identified key aspects of a good customer service process. These included being able to make contact easily, having lots of information provided about the process and what was going to happen, and having issues resolved quickly.

Communication systems

Many respondents said that a good customer service did not involve automated telephone systems or switchboards – they wanted to speak to ‘a real person’ when they contacted the service, and felt that automated systems would be a barrier for older or vulnerable adults. They wanted a central phone number to call if they needed to make contact.

Q11. Anything else you would like to tell us about what would make a good equipment loans service?

Finally, we asked respondents if they had any further suggestions or feedback on what would make a good community equipment loan service. 40 respondents (65%) chose to answer this question.

Responses to this question could be grouped into four themes:

- The need to publicise the service
- Previous experiences of community equipment services
- Funding
- Specific suggestions for developing the service

The need to publicise the service

A significant number of respondents (12) suggested that there was a need to more widely publicise the community equipment loan service, what equipment was available and how it could be accessed.

Suggestions for how to promote the service included leaflets, accessible websites, and including information in bulletins at Extra Care villages.

A lack of awareness of the service was also highlighted in responses to Q3.b) exploring reasons why people had chosen to buy equipment rather than loan it.

Previous experiences of community equipment services

Some respondents chose to feedback on their experiences of using a community equipment service. Feedback was mixed, however, it was unclear whether the feedback related to the service provided in Birmingham.

Funding

A number of responses focused on funding and financial arrangements for the community equipment service. Feedback received included:

- Money is being spent unnecessarily
- The council pays contractors and suppliers too much for equipment and work carried out
- The service requires additional funding, perhaps from the UK Government or the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

Specific suggestions for developing the service

Respondents provided a number of suggestions for how the service could be further developed.

Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment could look less clinical/hospital-like • Suggestions for specific items of equipment e.g. folding chairs for use outside the home • A better range of equipment with more choices
Service expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An 'Avon lady' style service where representatives come to homes and demonstrate range of equipment available • Arrangements with local charities and voluntary organisations to buy equipment for citizens and then reimburse • More help provided with adaptations • A good repair service where equipment is collected, repaired and brought back
Customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to contact and deliver on promises • Not being passed from person to person • Checking with citizens what equipment they would like before it is ordered • A good relationship between the provider and the citizen • Accessible at a reasonable time • Common sense, flexibility, accuracy, understanding • Compassionate with families after the loss of a child
Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with citizens to see if equipment is working for them • Have a clear list of equipment with pictures to make it easier for citizens to see what is available • It is important to provide citizens with instructions and information e.g. about collections • Coherent & cohesive approach to working with other services • Keep us on case load • The service should be prompt • Pay someone to coordinate returns and work with other agencies • Old equipment to be collected
Miscellaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would always rather buy my equipment rather than borrow it • To have a catalogue of equipment available to loan

4. Next steps

The information collected from this questionnaire will be used to inform the commissioning of the new Birmingham Community Equipment Loan Service, through the development of a commissioning strategy and service specification.

Appendix 1 – Citizen questionnaire

Your views on what a great Community Equipment Loans Service would look like

Introduction

Birmingham City Council wants to ensure it provides the best community equipment loans service that it can.

An equipment loans service is one that loans out equipment to help people who have been assessed as needing help with everyday tasks. (*Show pictures*).

Examples of equipment would be things like walking sticks and frames; raised toilet seats, bath seats, specialist chairs and beds and so on.

We are interested in your views of what a good equipment loans service should be like. And you can help us even if you have never borrowed any equipment of this type.

It should only take about 10 minutes of your time.

Questions

About You

1. If you, or someone you care for, needed equipment to help with everyday tasks where would you go for it?

2. Have you, or someone you care for, had equipment from an equipment loans service? (choose one)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't Know ☐

3. Have you ever purchased equipment for yourself or for someone you care for to help with everyday tasks? (choose one)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't Know ☐

If answered yes – ask 3b

3b. Why did you purchase equipment rather than get it from a community equipment loans service?

If answered NO to Q2 or Q3 – please go straight to Question 6

If answered YES to Q2 or Q3 – go to Question 4

4. Was the equipment for? (choose one)

Adult ☐

Child ☐

Adult and Child ☐

5. What type of equipment was it? (tick all that apply)

- Bathing/showering equipment ☐
- Toileting equipment ☐
- Household equipment ☐
- Transfer, raising equipment and hoists ☐
- Community nursing equipment ☐
- Mobility aids ☐

Other

Can't remember ☐

Delivery of equipment

Thinking about when equipment is to be delivered to a person's home.

6. What do you think a good delivery service should offer? (What would minimize inconvenience?)

7. What would you expect from a good fitting/installation service? (What would minimize inconvenience?)

Repairs

Thinking about if the equipment becomes damaged and needs to be repaired.

8. What would you expect a good repair service to be like? (What would minimize inconvenience?)

Return of loaned equipment

When equipment is borrowed from a loans service, the equipment should be returned when it is no longer needed.

9. What do you think would help people to return borrowed equipment promptly? (What would encourage people to return borrowed equipment?)

Customer Service

Sometimes problems or queries can arise with equipment, and help may be needed through customer services.

10. What do you think a good customer service would be like? (What makes a good customer service experience?)

Any Other Comments

11. Anything else you would like to tell us about what would make a good equipment loans service?

Panel

12. Would you be interested in being part of a panel to help plan future services?

If yes – ask them to complete the form to register their interest and collect the form from them. Give person the 'Fair processing' hand-out to take away for information on how BCC processes personal data.

Thank you very much for your time. Your views will help us to plan future services.