




# People's experience of using wheelchair services provided by OPCARE in Kirklees\*

Kirklees Scrutiny January Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018

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Kirklees

# Introduction

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**How can the process of getting a new wheelchair be made easier for a child with a severe physical disability?**

Ellie is 12 years old and has needed to use a wheelchair from a very young age. The last wheelchair she had became unfit for purpose because she had outgrown it. The process for acquiring a new wheelchair was long and challenging for her mum, Michelle, and Ellie's health suffered so much whilst waiting that Michelle felt forced to pay privately to get a new wheelchair for Ellie.

We use people's stories to highlight problems, and encourage the NHS to change and improve its services. Tell us your story today.

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# A story



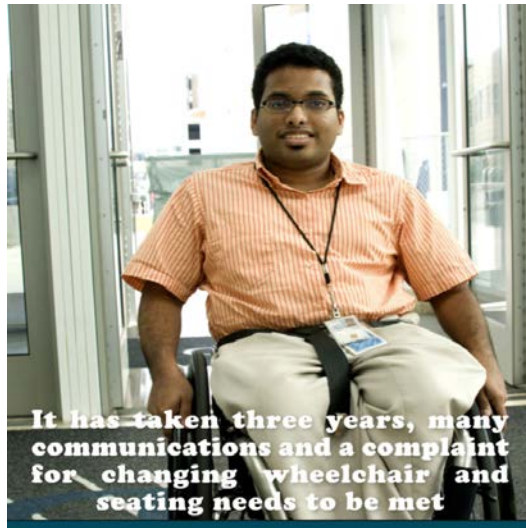
**Modifying a wheelchair that needs replacing, in an attempt to meet changing needs**

Lucy is twenty-eight years old. She has complex health needs including progressive neuromuscular disease, lower limb deformity and curvature of the spine. As a result, she uses a wheelchair with a specialist seating system, which was provided for a five-year period under the NHS voucher scheme. Since obtaining her wheelchair, her needs have changed, rendering her chair unsuitable. Though she should be eligible for a reassessment of her needs, the local NHS commissioned service provider for wheelchairs, Opcare will not carry this out.

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**It has taken three years, many communications and a complaint for changing wheelchair and seating needs to be met**

Alex is a young adult with complex needs. In 2014 it became clear that his wheelchair needs had changed and so an assessment was requested on his behalf. It took three years, many communications and a complaint to the Clinical Commissioning Group before a timetable was agreed for meeting Alex's wheelchair and seating needs. Alex's needs are currently being assessed.

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**Obtaining a new wheelchair for a child with a disability shouldn't be this difficult**

Olivia is 14 and because of her disability she has had to use a wheelchair all her life. When she needed a new wheelchair because she'd outgrown the one she had she was put on a waiting list and eventually had an assessment but the wrong wheelchair was ordered which led to an even longer wait.

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# Timeline

- Initial stories to Calderdale CCG October/November 2016
- “OPCARE has a well established service user group”
- December 2016 to May 2017 collecting stories, meeting carers & listening.
- May 2017 initial report to CCG’s & OPCARE
- Continued escalation of stories throughout 2017
- October/November/December 2017 Second survey of peoples experience in partnership with CCG & OPCARE

# Key points from initial engagement December 2016 to May 2017

1

**Opcare does not routinely offer assessments to children and young people.**

Children are not being regularly assessed and reviewed to identify whether their wheelchair meets their size and needs. The responsibility lies with parents and carers to get in touch with Opcare if they feel their child needs to be assessed and only then are they put on a waiting list to be seen. However, many parents/carers are not aware that it is their responsibility to contact Opcare for a review. This means that problems can be missed and, because of the lengthy waiting times, children and young people have no option but to use unsuitable wheelchairs, often resulting in pain, discomfort, poor posture and unnecessary injury.

<b>2</b>	<p><b>There are unacceptably long waiting times for service users to be assessed.</b></p> <p>Parents, carers and service users told us about being put on waiting lists for assessment, leaving them waiting months for an appointment and then being put on a further 2 or 3 waiting lists for measuring and fitting appointments. This means that some people are waiting over 12 months for a suitable wheelchair.</p>
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<b>3</b>	<p><b>The majority of people we spoke to are unhappy with the repairs service.</b></p> <p>People spoke of their concern regarding length of time it takes for repairs to be carried out and also the fact that wheelchairs are being repaired, in excess of their life span, instead of being replaced.</p>
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4

**Communication: People want to be provided with clear, accurate information and they want their voice to be heard**

Whether people are waiting for repair, assessment, or for delivery of a new wheelchair they want to be kept informed with accurate facts. People often feel that they have to chase up appointments, phone calls and visits and struggle to get the right information about how long they will have to wait.

Additionally, people feel Opcare doesn't take their concerns seriously and even when an ill-fitting wheelchair is having a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of the service user, and health professionals support these concerns, people don't feel they are listened to.

**5**

**Equipment not fit for purpose**

Parents, carers and service users told us that equipment is often not fit for purpose as the wheelchairs and seating systems provided often are not suitable for the environments in which the service user, their family and carers wish to use them. The equipment is therefore not promoting independence and inclusion.

People were also very concerned that many of the wheelchairs provided were providing inadequate posture support. We also heard of instances where poorly fitting wheelchairs and seating systems were causing necessary injuries such as pressure marks. We also heard of cases where unsuitable equipment had had more serious consequences such as admission to hospital (Accident & Emergency and Intensive Care) and surgery.

There were also concerns raised by many people that wheelchairs were being repaired rather than replaced due to financial constraints.

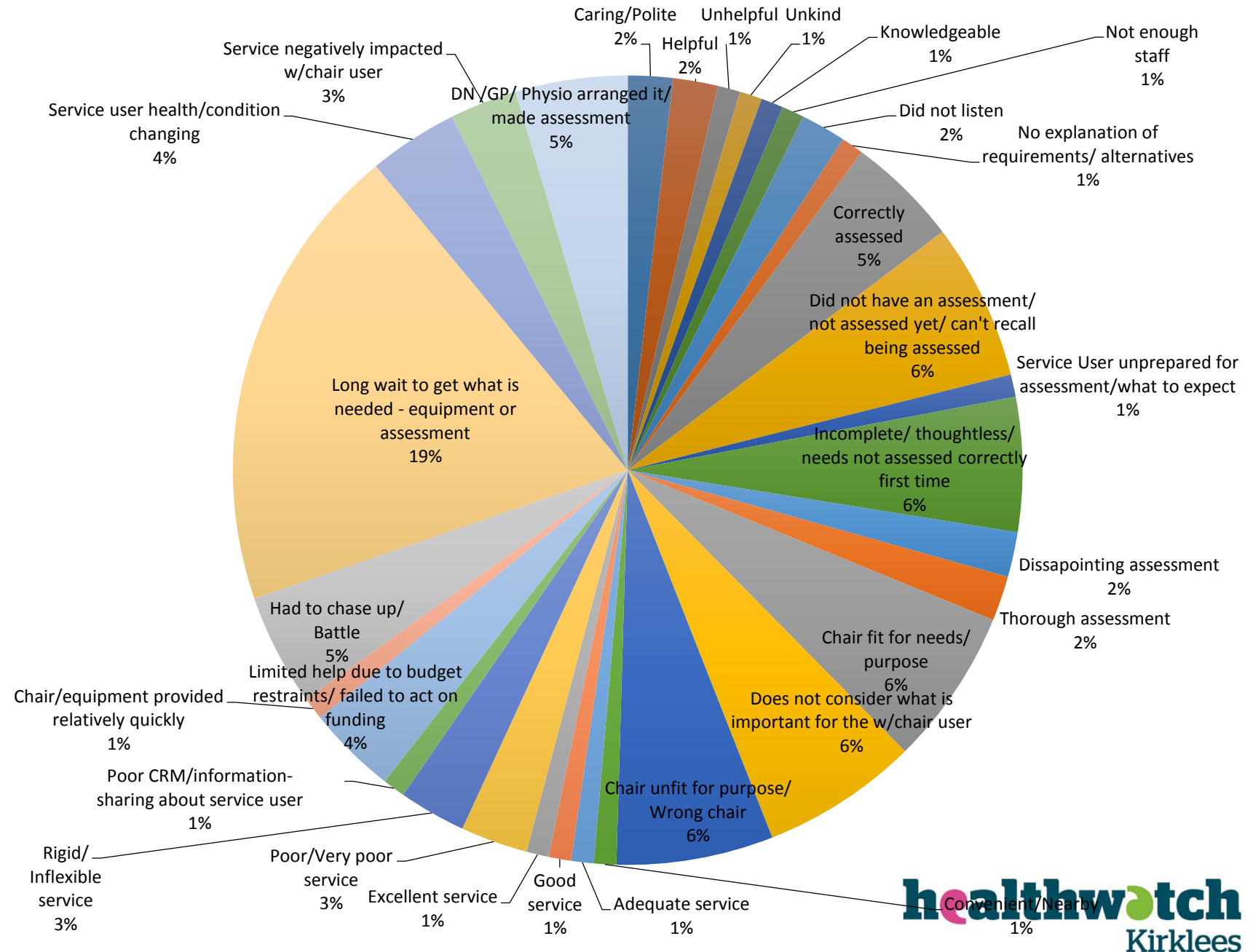


In Autumn 2017 we worked in partnership with CCG's and Opcare to comprehensively survey peoples experiences of using wheelchair services.

The results of the survey have been collated by colleagues in the engagement teams in the CCG's.

Healthwatch have independently verified the data and agree that the CCG report is a fair reflection of what people said.

Healthwatch contacted over 50 people who wanted to make more detailed comments



# Healthwatch perspective

“It is clear from the sustained and detailed stories that we have heard in the last 15 months that wheelchair services in Kirklees are not good enough.

We were disappointed that people’s stories have not been acted upon earlier. Opcare’s service user group was not representative of its customers. Many of the stories that we heard listed poor communication, poor standards of service, issues with repairs and unsuitable equipment that should have been identified earlier, and have still not been rectified.

Fundamentally this is about shortage of funding in wheelchair services and in the NHS as a whole. The wheelchair service is underfunded. The Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) that fund this service are being asked to make multi-million pound in year savings, and in this environment it is proving impossible to increase funding for a wheelchair service that people in Kirklees need to live independent and full lives.

The result of this underfunding is that many of the most vulnerable members of our community are waiting in pain for help.

We need to be honest if we are going to address this issue. Whilst there is work that Opcare and the CCGs can do to improve wheelchair services in Kirklees, their financial positions mean that they are unable to fund this service at the level that it requires. We should however, be asking whether children, older people and vulnerable adults needing wheelchair services should be a higher priority for financial support from our local NHS.”

Rory Deighton Director Healthwatch Kirklees January 2018