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# BSHAA CUSTOMER CARE SCHEME: INVITATION TO TENDER

## 1.0 Introduction

BSHAA intends to outsource the future operation of its customer care scheme and is seeking a suitably qualified partner to take full responsibility for its continuing success.

The customer care scheme provides a dispute resolution service for BSHAA members and their clients when local complaints procedures have been exhausted without reaching satisfactory agreement. The scheme provides independent, speedy and impartial resolution. Its effectiveness is measured by satisfaction levels of all parties, timely responsiveness and operational costs. The scheme also provides opportunity for BSHAA to identify common causes of dispute from which to capture and share learning about good practice.

This document provides details of the current operation of the scheme and outlines the minimum standards which those seeking to provide the future service must meet. Those responding to this invitation must demonstrate conclusively that they have excellent understanding of audiological practices and all relevant expertise to sustain these minimum standards of service. BSHAA will welcome responses demonstrating a commitment to measuring outcomes, improving effectiveness and sharing learning.

## 2.0 Background

### 2.1 About Hearing Care and Audiology

Audiology is the area of science and medicine concerned with hearing and the related field of audio vestibular balance. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), reduced capacity for hearing is the most prevalent cause of disability worldwide. Around one in 6 people in the UK are affected by poor hearing. This makes it the fourth highest burden of disability in the UK, largely through social impact of failure to achieve full potential in both work and leisure. For many, the true impact of poor hearing is not fully acknowledged. Only around a third of those who could benefit currently taking advantage of the tools and support available.

The main form of support with hearing focuses on prescription of Hearing Aids. These are classed as medical devices which can only be fitted following a clinical examination and assessment by a qualified professional. Hearing care is subject to professional regulation and is available through the NHS or through private practice<sup>1</sup>. The private sale of Hearing Aids is a protected function, which may only be undertaken by a Hearing Aid Dispenser (HAD) who is registered with the Health and Care Professions' Council (HCPC).

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<sup>1</sup> Audiology is one of the few professions where professional regulations differ considerably between provision in the public sector and by private practices.

## **2.2 About BSHAA**

BSHAA is the professional body recognised by the regulator as representing the professional interests of HADs. Whilst registration with HCPC is mandatory, membership of BSHAA is voluntary. Around 40% of practising HADs are BSHAA members, together with some of their assistants.

BSHAA provides members with clear guidance on both clinical and commercial aspects of their practice, as well as support with their needs for continuing professional development, education and training.

BSHAA maintains a good working relationship with HCPC for clinical matters relevant to members, and a similar relationship with Trading Standards for commercial aspects of good practice.

All members of BSHAA are automatically enrolled in BSHAA's Customer Care Scheme unless they choose to opt out. This scheme provides a dispute resolution service between a member and their client, in cases where complaints have not been resolved locally. This scheme provides assurance to both the individual seeking hearing care and the practising member. Analysis of problems that recur in referrals to the Customer Care Scheme allows BSHAA to improve guidance to members of how to avoid some of the more common complaints.

## **2.3 About the Customer Care Scheme**

The Customer Care Scheme is currently being run on an interim basis by David Foley – a member of BSHAA Council and an experienced audiologist.

This open tender process aims to ensure that the scheme is brought under a fully transparent commercial arrangement.

## **3.0 Background**

The Customer Care Scheme (CCS) aims wherever practical to provide a reconciliation mechanism for consumers who are unable to achieve satisfactory resolution of a complaint they have against a BSHAA member. The scheme aims to reassure consumers about making a purchase from a BSHAA member, whilst also reassuring members that they will be supported to resolve difficulties they may have with an unrealistic complaint.

In reviewing the practical operation and resourcing of the scheme, the aim remains unchanged, and the process must continue to reflect the promotional message of assurance when dealing with a BSHAA member. The scheme is not a replacement for audiologists having an effective customer complaints management process in place. As with all complaints, timely resolution at first point of engagement will always be the preferred option, and complaints reaching the CCS are likely to be more complex or to reflect more ingrained positions between the two parties.

Prior to the pandemic, roughly 45 referrals were made to CCS annually, excluding general enquiries which did not call for detailed investigation. More referrals have been received throughout the pandemic for a variety of different causes. In the latest 12-month period, this number is around 50% higher than the historical number.

Operation of the CCS has historically cost between £20 and £25k per annum and the new provider is expected to demonstrate approaches that will contain the costs of the service, with a mix of improvements in efficiency, and publication of learning that will help members improve their local resolution and reduce the escalating number of referrals

## 4.0 The scheme aims and principles

The aims and principles of the scheme remain unchanged by the management review, which is intended to improve the timeliness and cost effectiveness of the investigation process.

The scheme should be characterised by the following:

- the aims of the CCS remain unchanged, and the experience of using the scheme must continue to reinforce the message of assurance to both consumer and member;
- the scheme is not a substitute for the audiologists' own complaints scheme, and should only be used where attempts at local resolution have been exhausted;
- the privacy of both the complainant and audiologist must be preserved throughout the investigation and following resolution;
- the investigation must be independent of any connection with either party, and free of any conflicting interests;
- the investigation will draw heavily on good practice and previous lessons learned, and will seek to capture and share fresh learning;
- investigations should have access to appropriately qualified support in audiology practice, consumer law and dispute resolution techniques;
- the scheme will be operated with reference to clinical and professional standards established by the Health and Care Profession Council (HCPC), to consumer protection legislation with reference to guidance from Trading Standards Office, and to BSHAA's own Code of Practice and published guidance.

## 5.0 The process model

The Customer Care Scheme must provide the following process steps:

- receiving, recording, and acknowledging the complaint;
- explaining how the investigation will be conducted and gaining consent to collect and store data relevant to the investigation;
- gathering data, investigating and identifying possible ways forward.
- maintaining engagement and reporting progress to the parties;
- making recommendations and negotiating resolution;
- agreeing closure of the investigation;
- capturing learning from individual investigations, identifying, and reporting common issues and trends, monitoring the scheme effectiveness and preparing an annual scheme report.

In addition to the resolution of individual referrals, the scheme must provide an annual summary report which is shared with key stakeholders including the regulator, the public and organisations representing key groups served by members (e.g., RNID).

Additional ad hoc reporting is also a key benefit of the scheme. Emergent trends, and case studies present an important opportunity to encourage members to excel in both customer care and clinical practice.

The contract will initially be let for a period of 3 years, with a break clause at the end of the first year, which may be triggered with 3 months' notice, if performance does not meet the required standard. Performance of the contract will be reviewed quarterly. Provided that the contract goals are achieved whilst maintaining strong customer satisfaction and good financial efficiency, Council may choose to extend the contract for a further two years with minimal additional tendering, but the successful party should anticipate a fully competitive re-tendering after a maximum period of 5 years.

## 6.0 Responding to the tender

Invitations are invited from any party wishing to provide BSHAA's Customer Care Scheme.

In responding to this invitation, parties should provide:

- description of how the service will be provided, including an example illustrating how an investigation might proceed;
- evidence of relevant experience in delivering a similar service, including highlights of how the operation of CCS may contrast with the current experience, and how that difference will be managed;
- explanation of how the scheme will be managed and reported, including how issues will be escalated and risks will be managed (including identification of key risks to BSHAA and how they will be mitigated);
- an explanation of how privacy and confidentiality will be maintained, including how potential conflict of interest will be identified and avoided;
- description of the team who will deliver the scheme, including qualifications and experience of key personnel, a resourcing profile and a full CV for the contract manager.
- commercial terms and conditions;
- bid price and payment terms.

Tender responses must be sent to [admin@bshaa.org](mailto:admin@bshaa.org) by the deadline of noon on the 14<sup>th</sup> October. Requests for further information or to discuss these requirements should also be directed by email to [admin@bshaa.org](mailto:admin@bshaa.org).

Bidders should prepare to be invited to present their proposal to an evaluation panel in the week commencing 5<sup>th</sup> November.