

CEO Report: October 2019

Thank you Chair. Although this is my very first Vista AGM, I am acutely aware of the 160 years of our history as a local charity supporting people affected by sight loss and we have much to celebrate.

Our Annual Report highlights many areas of our work over the year and as the new CEO, writing this report was a wonderful way for me to learn about and to share the work we've been doing with people of all ages across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has welcomed me to the Vista family and helped me to learn about our history and our work – something that is very much an ongoing project!

A summary of the Annual Report was sent to all members and this year we chose to emphasise the number of people that we work with to give an insight into the sheer scale of our organisation and the impact of our work. The full document is available to anyone on request.

It is easy to forget that people in many areas of the UK do not have access to similar levels of service and for us to take Vista for granted so I'd like to take this opportunity to report on some of the key areas of our work:

I can't talk about Vista's successes without acknowledging the amazing work of our **care staff who provide a safe, nurturing and caring home** for people who need significant support. We were bitterly disappointed when, last year, Kathleen Rutland was visited by the CQC and rated as Requires Improvement because, although we continuously look for improvement, we are very proud of all four of our residential homes. Since then, Kathleen Rutland and Simmins Court have both had new CQC reviews and I am delighted to report that all our residential services are now rated as GOOD.

Rehabilitation services across the UK are struggling as demand continues to grow and resources get ever tighter. We are lucky to be able to provide and protect this essential support on behalf of our local councils and the people who need to access them. Last year 2,149 people received assessment, training and support through this statutory service at Vista.

The **Low Vision Service** delivered 415 clinics last year, offering people access to clinical expertise and time to understand their condition and explore magnification and lighting solutions that might aid them in every day life. Although this remains one of our most important services, this is a reduction in capacity from previous years resulting in people having to wait longer for an appointment. We are working with the LRI and NHS commissioners to address this.

Our **Eye Clinic Liaison Officers** continue to be a genuine success story. Embedded in the Ophthalmology clinics at the city and community hospitals, they help ensure that as many people as possible get access to information about registration and support services in a timely way. We know that many areas of the UK do not have any ECLO staff at all so we are especially proud of our team who held over 5,500 conversations to help people navigate their sight loss journey.

The **Low Vision and ECLO services are often forgotten by the NHS** when eye health and sight loss services are being planned, so it is important to report that the Clinical Commissioning Groups (NHS Commissioners), Hospital teams and Local Eye Health Network (part of NHS England) are working with us to redesign the services and the way they integrate into other health and social care.

In 2018/19 we **secured contracts to continue provision of statutory services** including Rehabilitation and DeafBlind support as well as maintaining the Register for people who are sight impaired and severely sight impaired. Like all public services, resources for these are tight and we will be working with people who use these services to explore ways in which we can continue to provide high quality support for as many people as possible.

Our hosted programmes are also progressing well. **Leicester Aging Together** has been awarded additional funding to continue the projects having greatest impact and help them become a permanent part of the way volunteer and community support grows in the City. **Work Live Leicestershire** is now well established, helping people in rural areas of the county overcome barriers to accessing education, training and employment through a keyworkers embedded in community organisations.

You can find more information about these and our many other services via our website or simply give us a call.

Of course we also have a wide range of services specialising in helping **children, families and young people** through which over 1700 people had support to adapt to the impact that sight loss has on them.

We have spoken at **previous AGM meetings** about the potential development of the site on Hinkley Road in **Leicester Forest East**, currently occupied by the Kathleen Rutland Home, Applegarth Home and Low Vision service. This is one of the largest projects that Vista will ever undertake and has been several years in development, so we have taken time to review our plans and consult our members.

Many of you have contributed to the consultation process, for which thank you, and we have also put time into conversations with groups of service users, staff, volunteers and partner organisations. As a result of this review, we have updated our plans which now include a large sight loss centre alongside the re-provision of the care home. **This change to the scope means we can use the site to support many more people affected by sight loss and develop a regional centre of excellence and was approved by the Board in July.** We are now working with an architect with significant experience in health, care and sight loss to design an amazing facility to house Vista, our services and our residents for the future.

Sadly, this exciting project has also meant some difficult decisions. One of the **hardest tasks of my first 6 months in post** was to consider and approve actions to finally remove tenants from the bungalows on the LFE site so that clearance works and development could proceed. To move the remaining 7 people out of these old fashioned and isolated but very familiar residences into new homes that better suit their needs was challenging – not just logistically but also emotionally – for a team whose core purpose is to provide care and support for vulnerable people.

However, doing the right thing is not the same as doing the easy thing and **I ask members to recognise the compassion, efforts and dedication of the staff who worked tirelessly to prepare, support and assist these tenants to move into their new homes.**

Now that a large part of the LFE site is unoccupied, preparation and clearance work is already underway and if you have visited recently you will have seen some fencing in place and probably several people in hard hats and high-vis jackets, but we are of course working really hard with residents, visitors and staff to minimise the disruption to the services that will continue to be provided on the site.

An intensive period is now beginning to capture the essential elements that people affected by sight loss want and need the new site to provide and this includes those who will live, visit and work there. We have already got some working groups looking at different aspects of this and if you indicated in your consultation response that you'd be willing to be further involved you will be hearing from us again soon.

If I spoke about all our services, we'd be here till Brexit, but I would just like to also remind members that **our front line care and services are supported by an equally dedicated but often less visible team** and ask them to join me in thanking everyone who plays a part in the Vista team. This is particularly relevant this year as in addition to delivering the services we've reported on, we also introduced new IT and business systems and moved into the new offices at 16 New Walk – both large projects in their own right.

I started at Vista in January, so most of the work in our annual report **happened before I arrived**, although that doesn't in any way stop me being immensely proud of it and of the organisation I am joining. In short, I can report that **in 2018-19 we met or exceeded all of our contract commitments and targets** and we delivered a staggering amount of direct and indirect support to thousands of people and I am committed to making sure that we continue to do so.

Vista has a well-earned reputation as one of the leading independent sight loss organisations in the UK and the passion, commitment and ambition I see in our staff and volunteers is undeniable. With so many more improvements and developments being planned I am sure we will maintain this reputation and continue to have impact across LLR and beyond.

Finally, Chair, may I take this opportunity to again thank everyone in the Vista family, including the members (and in fact especially the Forum members), for making me feel so welcome and for taking time to talk to me about where they think we can further improve – together we can make a difference and I look forward to many more of these conversations in future.

Susan Hoath
Chief Executive Officer, October 2019