Patients with hearing difficulties can receive help from the NHS with the fitting of hearing aids. Currently there are many models of hearing aids available on the NHS to ameliorate problems of communication and orientation. Two main forms of signal processing are used- analogue, which can be basic (linear aids) or sophisticated (non-linear and digitally programmable aids) and digital processing.

Currently a Modernising Hearing Aid Services First Wave Pilot Project comparing digital hearing aids with the current NHS range and the sophisticated analogue devices is being undertaken on a national level. East and West Berkshire are also involved in this First Wave Pilot Project which is due to be completed in March 2002.

Following recent guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE), the Berkshire Priorities Committee recommends that the following NICE guidance on Hearing Aid Technology be adopted in Berkshire:

1. The full range of hearing aids available at the NHS audiology centres is made available to the patient. **Assume sophisticated analogue aids confer more benefit than the basic linear aids.**

2. The hearing aid offered is based on careful matching with patient needs and choice with binaural aids being offered as clinically appropriate.

3. Until results are known from the Modernising Hearing Aids First Wave Project there is not enough evidence to support the introduction of digital hearing aids to Berkshire.

This statement will be reviewed in the light of new evidence or guidance from NICE.

References:
2. RNID Factsheet- Digital Hearing Aids. www.rnid.org.uk