

# Executive Committee

No Specific Ward Relevance

10th March 2010

## **RE-COMMISSIONING OF HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SERVICES INTO A COUNTYWIDE AGENCY.**

(Report of the Head of Community Services)

### **1. Summary of Proposals**

The report informs Members of proposals to re-commission the current Care & Repair agency services (also known as Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services) in partnership with Worcestershire County Council, Supporting People, the Worcestershire PCT and the six District Councils. The report seeks Member approval for the re-commissioning process based upon the current level of funding provided by this Council, continuing to be contributed into a new single Countywide Home Improvement Agency.

The report also introduces and recommends the Council's participation in the roll out to Worcestershire authorities of the Kickstart scheme that currently operates in the West Midlands offering an alternative form of assistance to help home owners improve and renovate their dwellings through subsidised loan facilities.

### **2. Recommendations**

**The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that**

- 1) the Council agrees the commencement of the new Countywide Home Improvement Agency from April 2010 provided by Festival Housing Group;**
- 2) the Head of Community Services, in consultation with the Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services finalise and enter into the necessary legal arrangements to implement the transfer and commencement of the new service; and**

**to RESOLVE that**

- 3) the new HIA be supported through the use of revenue and capital base budget contributions that are committed to the current service arrangements with the North Worcestershire Care & Repair Agency.**

### 3. Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Climate Change / Carbon Management Implications

#### Financial

- 3.1 Confidential Appendix One

#### Legal

- 3.2 A new contract will be entered into by the Council and Festival Housing Group for the provision of delivering DFG's and Lifetime Loans on transfer of the service to Festival Housing Group.
- 3.3 Appendix 1 to this report is exempt in accordance with S.100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, as it contains information relating to a contract being negotiated with a third party. For the Council to reveal details at this stage may affect the Council's negotiating position with that third party. It is therefore felt that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

#### Policy

- 3.4 Housing Assistance Policy was agreed on the 11 January 2006 for Lifetime grants. Work is currently being undertaken to revise the Housing Assistance Policy and Code of Practise.

#### Risk

- 3.5 Should the Council not join the Countywide Scheme there will be a requirement to fund our own service which there is currently no budget. The current supporting people funding for the North Worcestershire Agency is to be allocated to the Countywide Service therefore a requirement to cover this extra cost will also be required for a Redditch Service.
- 3.6 The Council will not be in a position to deliver the enhanced level of services to older and disabled people without extra funding, unless it works in partnership with all of the main partners across the County and benefits from the additional resources being made available to the HIA through Supporting People, Kickstart and the First Stop grant.
- 3.7 Failure to implement the Kickstart scheme will mean that the Worcestershire authorities will be unable to access ring fenced regional funding that is allocated to them and may lead to their not

being an established alternative solution for home owners in the event of local authority capital becoming less available to support the allocation of local authority discretionary grant.

### Climate Change / Carbon Management

- 3.8 Grant funded energy efficiency measures will be undertaken to properties through the HIA reducing CO2 emissions and reducing occupier's energy costs.

### Report

#### 4. Background

- 4.1 Central to the Government's framework for delivery of older people's services are the roles of Home Improvement Agencies. This was clearly outlined in the Government strategy "**Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods – National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society**"
- 4.2 The national strategy (published in February 2008) is particularly relevant to the question of Home Improvement Agency and other statutory services such as disabled adaptations in Worcestershire. It sets out a comprehensive strategic approach to older persons housing and contains key proposals, some of which are accompanied by new funds for:
- Support to strengthen local housing advice, information and 'moving home' services for older people.
  - The modernisation of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) including the increase to 30,000 maximum grant and the ability of Local Authorities to recover grant in certain circumstances.
  - Greater encouragement of loans and equity release, with an acknowledgement that HIAs could provide information and support to help people access funding options.
  - New rapid repairs and adaptations services, expanding the coverage of handyperson schemes.
- 4.3 Following on from the national strategy a further report was published on HIAs "The Future Home Improvement Agency: Supporting choice and maintaining independence" which outlined the importance of HIAs in delivering advice services, supporting people to remain in their own home and their preventative role in terms of ill health.

### 5. Key Issues

- 5.1 Redditch Borough Council has been operating the North Worcestershire HIA covering Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest since the beginning of 2005. Festival Housing Group has been operating the South Worcestershire HIA covering Wychavon and Worcester since January 2006. The expansion of this service into Malvern Hills to cover the whole of the South Worcestershire geographical area has not been achieved.
- 5.2 Supporting People has been the main driver of this initiative and a report was taken to the Chief Executives Panel outlining the key reasons for uniting the two agencies and reviewing their current roles with a view to delivering a more comprehensive and consistent service across the whole county. This work would also give the Local Authorities the opportunity to identify good practise both within the county and by considering models of HIA from across the country and to incorporate delivery of the Kickstart funding programme, for which each the Local Authorities had received a grant allocation from the Regional Assembly.
- 5.3 Any future commissioning of services needs to see a greater joining up of housing, health and social care programmes, and HIA services must be capable of meeting this broad range of demand by offering services with cross-cutting objectives across tenures. Re-commissioning HIA services will offer the opportunity to ensure they play a key role in delivering much improved housing-related services to growing numbers of older people.
- 5.4 A Project Management Group, consisting of Supporting People, Borough & District Councils, Worcestershire County Council, the PCT and Foundations (the Government's co-ordinating agency for HIAs) was set up to oversee the review. Additional project management was provided by Foundations, through grant funding provided by Worcestershire County Council and this service provided technical expertise and useful examples of service delivery in other parts of the country. In addition an officer group was established to review the District's current Housing Assistance Policies (HAP) and to develop a countywide HAP that covered the majority of services on offer including disabled facilities grants, home improvement grants and loans, handyman services etc. This revised policy will be brought to a future executive committee for approval.
- 5.5 The urgency of progressing the project remains, with the intention of the new HIA commencing from 1st April 2010 and with this in mind, the Project Management Group mapped the existing provision within

the county, identified best practice examples nationally, the outcomes being met and also identified potential organisations to tender for this piece of work.

- 5.6 Supporting People, the project lead, believed that a full tender exercise would not deliver the best outcomes in terms of a service model for Worcestershire and that they would consider direct negotiations with an existing service provider, Festival Housing Group. In particular their reasons for selecting this organisation were as follows;
- A consortium was already established providing the majority of the related provision within Worcestershire; the consortium is made up of Festival Housing, Evesham and Pershore Housing Association, Worcester Community Housing, Wyre Forest Community Housing. Supporting People currently contract with Festival Housing and have no concerns over their ability to manage the Home Improvement Agency under the consortium umbrella.
  - If the group were to tender, the consortium expressed an interest with the view of submitting a tender. The consortium would be strong contenders in a tender due to their available capacity, the quality of the current provision and the opportunity to have improved value for money within this arrangement.
  - The market place in terms of appropriate and suitable providers is very limited; in regards to the providers who could have tendered for this contract (other than Festival) there were concerns over capacity to deliver in addition to a requirement to provide longer implementation phases within the contract due to the work involved to establish networks and working arrangements (which have mostly been adapted by the Consortium already).
  - It was also felt that greater benefits and outcomes could be delivered from the Consortium contract and the Project Management Group would be able to negotiate greater value for money than if we went through a tender exercise with a new provision. Although employed by Redditch Borough Council many of the staff within the North Worcestershire HIA worked directly with, and were managed by, members from within the consortium, making the transition to the new organisation likely to be more acceptable and seamless for those officers with TUPE rights. This in turn would benefit service users who wouldn't, in the majority of cases, even experience a change of personal in the transition period and would therefore get some continuity in case management.

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- 5.7 The decision to proceed with a direct negotiation with Festival Housing Group was discussed by the Chief Executives Panel on 11th September 2009 and agreement reached that this approach could proceed.
- 5.8 The development of the Consortium and the intent to bring services together in a more strategic manner has been endorsed by Officers within The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), and also acknowledged by Officers of the Worcestershire Partnership as an effective partnership arrangement which may increase the opportunity to access additional funding / utilise existing funding more effectively and subsequently achieve greater value for money and improved service provision for service users.
- 5.9 It is the intention of the Project Management Group to let the contract on a three year basis with an opportunity to extend for further 2 years.

### **SERVICES TO BE DELIVERED BY THE NEW HIA**

- 5.10 The Worcestershire partner organisations see significant benefits for local older and disabled residents from delivering services through a Home Improvement Agency that covers the county and works closely with social care and health professionals.
- 5.11 The vision for the new Agency is that it will deliver a range of options, including helping people to repair, improve, maintain or adapt their home. The purpose of the service is to help people live independently, in the home of their choice, warm, safe and secure. The range of services on offer, subject to the level of funding available, could include:
- a) Information, advice and signposting.
  - b) Disabled Facility grant and other housing grant work.
  - c) Fitting aids and adaptations.
  - d) Minor works and handyperson services.
  - e) Falls and accident prevention.
  - f) Hospital discharge support.
  - g) Home energy, security and safety checks.
  - h) Advocacy and support on housing options.
  - i) Kickstart loans.

Much of the Council's work on Disabled Facilities Grants and other housing assistance to the private sector will continue to be channelled through such partnership arrangements.

- 5.12 During the process of establishing the HIA the Project Management Group bid for some additional funding to support the establishment of a signposting support, information and advice service as part of the HIA and were successful in receiving an allocation of £40k for 20010/11 and £40k 2011/12 to develop this crucial aspect of the new HIA. This funding will be held directly by the HIA.
- 5.13 Also during the process of establishing the HIA the Kickstart sub-group submitted the proposal for the Local Delivery Plan (LDP) (attached at Appendix Two) to the West Midlands Kickstart Partnership Board. Kickstart is a regionally funded scheme that provides an additional or alternative form of assistance to help home owners improve and renovate their dwellings through subsidised property appreciation loan facilities. The funding for this scheme is held centrally by Birmingham City Council and administered by them on behalf of the partnership.
- 5.14 The LDP outlines the mechanisms for delivery of the Kickstart programme, the timescales and the required level of funding. The Kickstart group are meeting to discuss the LDP on 3rd February and we hope that the outcome should be known spring 2010.
- 5.15 The delivery of the Kick Start loans and the cost of scheme management and supervision within the proposed new HIA will be funded from the ring fenced regional funding that is allocated to the districts for the purposes of promoting Kick Start.
- 5.16 The advantages of progressing a centralised Worcestershire scheme of engagement with Kick Start are seen to be:
- a) Reduced marketing, management and administration costs.
  - b) Ability to embody the scheme within the proposed new HIA structure.
  - c) Ability to be co terminal with the Worcestershire Local Area Agreement and become a stronger priority to support HIA funding.
  - d) Provide a consistent approach to delivery of the service across the County.
  - e) To have a stronger voice within the Regional Kick Start programme and negotiate the ring fencing of Kickstart funding to Worcestershire rather than run the risk of losing unspent allocation to other parts of the Region.
- 5.17 There is a likelihood that the availability of LA capital funds to provide discretionary grants could potentially diminish and the establishment of a Kick Start scheme will enable the public to view

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other forms of funding works as a valued alternative and option to gradually supplement and if necessary eventually replace the availability of discretionary grants.

- 5.18 Whilst funding remains available the HIA, on behalf of the council, will continue to offer grants (up to £5k) for decent homes work to vulnerable households not eligible for Kickstart loans for example due to a lack of equity in their property.

### 6. Other Implications

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|------------------------------|---|--|
| Asset Management             | - | None.  |
| Community Safety             | - | The Worcestershire HIA will undertake works that will provide security to vulnerable resident's homes.   |
| Health                       | - | The Worcestershire HIA aims to provide the ageing population with more services and provide greater choice and quality and independence.   |
| Human Resources              | - | The staff of the North Worcestershire Care & Repair Agency currently employed by Redditch Borough Council will be transferred to Festival Housing Group under TUPE arrangements. |
| Social Exclusion             | - | The aim of the HIA is to provide assistance and advice to vulnerable residents to enable them to remain in their home which is safe and decent.                                  |
| Environment / Sustainability | - | None.  |

### 7. Lessons Learnt

None.

### 8. Background Papers

Lifetime Homes - see

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/lifetimehomesneighbourhoods>



**9. Consultation**

All relevant Borough officers and all Worcestershire Local Authorities.

**10. Author of Report**

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**11. Appendices**

- Appendix 1 - Confidential financial information.
- Appendix 2 - Kickstart Local Delivery Plan.