

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**CABINET**
26TH MARCH 2009**Recommissioning of Home Improvement Agency Services & Kickstart**

OPEN	
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	Improved Health & Wellbeing
CORPORATE PLAN AIM:	Enabling Community Wellbeing
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Anne Hingley
HEAD OF SERVICE:	Head of Planning, Health and Environment
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APPENDICES:	None

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of proposals to recommission 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.
- 1.2 To seek approval for the recommissioning process and the continuing level of budgetary and staffing resource currently provided by the Council, to be contributed into a new single Countywide Home Improvement Agency.
- 1.3 Further to the Cabinet report dated 26th June 2008 entitled, 'Wyre Forest District Council Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy', officers were requested to report back on the progress on developing the Kickstart scheme. This report recommends the Council's participation in a new countywide Kickstart scheme.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is recommended to DECIDE:

- 2.1 **To confirm the participation in the joint recommissioning of a new countywide Home Improvement Agency and to authorise the Head of Planning, Health & Environment, in consultation with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, to finalise the necessary contractual arrangements for the commencement of the new service.**
- 2.2 **To support the new HIA 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.**
- 2.3 **Approve the roll out and implementation of the Kickstart Scheme across Worcestershire as set out in section 5 of the report.**

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Government White Paper “Our Health, Our Care, Our Say: A new Direction for Community Services” was published in January 2006. This White Paper was the first of a series of major strategic announcements aimed at transforming the commissioning and accountability of public services.

The Government approach highlights the following policy drivers:

- An ageing population presents many challenges – there is demand for more services but also a demand for greater choice and quality and independence.
- The need to target scarce resources at those at higher risk drives a need to develop ways of accurately mapping need and dealing with the problem where it's most acute.
- Pooling budgets and resources are accompanied by an equally powerful drive for individualised solutions and budgets.
- There is a strong steer to invest in preventative services and to save money on acute services (such as hospital admissions) in the medium and long-term.
- There is a requirement to design services across health, housing and social services.

3.2 **Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods – National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society**

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)
- 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 across the country from 2009. The expansion will be supported by funding of £13 million in 2009/2010 and £18 million in 2010/2011. A bidding process to achieve wider coverage of handyperson services will be developed and put in place this year.

The strategy outlines where the Government wants to be in five years’ time.

- New housing will be built to Lifetime Homes Standards and new communities will be built to the concept of Lifetime Neighbourhoods.
- Existing housing stock will be improved to raise its quality and promote good health. Many more homes will be warm and comfortable.
- Major and minor adaptations will become easier to obtain.

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- Major adaptations through the Disabled Facilities Grant will be quick and simple to obtain and appropriately linked to other services.
- Home improvement and handyman services will be widely accessible. Home Improvement Agencies will be available in all parts of the country and will deliver a more proactive, wider range of services.
- People will get these services before a crisis happens.
- Where housing services are needed they will be personal, progressive, high quality and joined-up. They will provide choice and will give individuals more control to make housing-related decisions.

3.3 HIAs primarily help homeowners and private sector residents, who are older and disabled, to remain in their own home, living independently in safety and comfort.

'The growth of the HIA sector has been crucial in meeting the growing need for help with repairs and adaptations for increasing numbers of lower income older owner occupiers. The sector is more than 20 years old, and has grown to become a significant provider of services for older, disabled and vulnerable householders. In 1999 only 54 per cent of local authorities had a HIA. By 2006, this figure had risen to 90 per cent helped by investment through Supporting People. However, service provision within the HIA sector remains patchy, with a number of weak agencies, and some agencies only offering basic services. We believe that the sector has not yet reached its potential.'

Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods, A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society, page 68 (Communities and Local Government, 2008).

Current position in Worcestershire

- 3.4 Redditch Borough Council has been operating the North Worcestershire HIA covering Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest since the beginning of 2005 (although Redditch operated its own HIA for many years prior to that). 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.
- 3.5 There has been some very positive work carried out by the HIAs in Worcestershire, but the Worcestershire Chief Housing Officers Group and the Supporting People Commissioning Body, which in part funds the HIAs, are of the clear opinion that there needs to be a comprehensive change in the operation of services. A report proposing the recommissioning of the service was endorsed by the Worcestershire Chief Executives' Panel at its meeting on 12th September 2008. The key reasons are outlined below:
- i) A review of both HIA services has not taken place since their inception and is overdue. The development of a County wide service was an original requirement of the Supporting People grant allocated to extend the services and was incorporated into the funding approval made by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, as a future outcome.

- ii) Operational practices, for instance, in regard to handyman services, small repairs and hospital discharge programmes, are not consistent across the county. It is essential that within Worcestershire we ensure that the Agency arrangements are fit for purpose and ready for expanding their role, in line with the Government Strategy for older persons housing, Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods Strategy.
- iii) There has been a North Worcestershire Code of Practice for Adaptations in draft format for a significant amount of time. There has been a lack of progress on finalising this document and equally sharing the practice with the South Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency. The involvement of the Primary Care Trust has been inconsistent and a fully integrated approach is required to provide consistency over the role of occupational Therapists.
- iv) At the current time the services being delivered by the HIAs are neither consistent within the areas they work or across the county area. There are also concerns over the variable alignment of services with health and social care. A more suitable delivery option to achieve the consistency required for customers, that would also enable best practice to be rolled out across the county is required.
- v) Funding has also been provided by Communities and Local Government via the Regional Housing Pot Funding to be used for the implementation of Kickstart equity release schemes across Worcestershire. The HIAs have again been identified as the delivery vehicle for these and a standardised approach is required to do this across the county.
- vi) The national changes to the Disabled Facilities Grants programme, delivered by the North and South Worcestershire Care and Repair Agencies, and the pooling of the grant from 2010 – 2011 under the Local Area Agreement, make this an opportune time to also review housing adaptations with District Councils, Worcestershire County Council and the Primary Care Trust, each of which have statutory responsibilities in service delivery. This service is primarily delivered by the HIAs, but operationally and administratively, is complex, with wide ranging standards of service delivery. This would enable the Local Authorities to approve a new approach to Disabled Facilities Grants, which are a District Council responsibility.

3.6 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. Re-commissioning HIA services should offer the opportunity to ensure they play a key role in delivering much improved housing-related services to growing numbers of older people. Any newly configured service arrangements will still place a premium on seamless delivery of functions at the customer interface.

3.7 In order to jointly re-commission a Countywide Service, a Project Management Group, consisting of District Councils, Worcestershire County Council, Supporting People, the PCT and Foundations (the Government's co-ordinating agency for HIAs) has been set up to oversee the review. It will also be considering any necessary changes to the domestic adaptations service at the same time.

- 3.8 The Group is chaired by the Housing Services Manager from Wyre Forest District Council and additional project management services will be provided by Foundations through grant funding provided to Wyre Forest District Council via Worcestershire County Council. A draft project plan and timetable have been produced and Task & Finish Groups are in the process of being set up.
- 3.9 The urgency of progressing the project is partly because of the need to secure additional Supporting People contract funding before 1st April 2010 when Supporting People funding goes into the County Area Based Grant pot.

4. PROPOSED NEW SERVICES

- 4.1 The Government has confirmed that HIA's are the vehicle through which it sees many of its policy objectives for older people being delivered and the Worcestershire partner organisations see significant benefits for local older and disabled residents from such shared arrangements.
- 4.2 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 potentially on offer, subject to the level of funding available, could include:
- Disabled Facility grant and other housing grant work
 - Fitting aids and adaptations
 - Minor works and handyperson services
 - Falls and accident prevention
 - Hospital discharge support
 - Home energy, security and safety checks
 - Advocacy and support on housing options
 - Gardening and decorating
 - 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. PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF THE KICKSTART SCHEME IN WORCESTERSHIRE

- 5.1 The Kickstart Scheme 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 equity release loan facilities.
- 5.2 The Kick-start scheme provides fund management for equity release and other loans and the provision of financial advice to customers in providing a range of affordable loan products to fund home repair and improvement secured against the equity in the property. The scheme will:
- o Provide financial advice and assistance to clients referred by the LA.
 - o Fund the provision of the loan itself

- Fund the loan set up and arrangement costs

5.3 The West Midland Sub Region Kickstart Pilot Programme (Birmingham, Dudley, Walsall, Coventry, Stoke, Wolverhampton and Sandwell) was set up four years ago as a result of the Government's Kickstart Funding being allocated to Regional Housing Boards in support of the Sustainable Communities Plan.

5.4 Regional housing capital funding for the whole region is now being ring fenced specifically for the Kickstart Scheme to be rolled out to the whole of the West Midlands Region. The funding provides for scheme supervision and management as well as the provision of loans to home owners.

5.5 A local Kickstart Officer Steering Group has been meeting to investigate the implications of introducing the scheme in Worcestershire and to compare the scheme with other similar schemes available. The Steering Group has come to the following conclusions:

- Whilst the ability to introduce the scheme enables a change in culture from the use of discretionary local authority grants for private housing renewal to equity release and loan based solutions, the general consensus is that the scheme will initially only be introduced to provide an additional solution for higher cost, more extensive renovation works to complement the continuing availability of discretionary grants and loans to home owners requiring lower cost minor works.
- In comparing the scheme with other products or the possibility of developing a 'go it alone scheme', it was established that the Kickstart Scheme is the only scheme capable of accessing the Regional ring fenced funding to provide subsidised loan products including Property Appreciation Loans for all client age groups.
- Kickstart is potentially a more financially attractive and accessible product for a wider client group. It is a product that can be offered to a wider age range and a service that could be offered (subject to the development of an agreed criteria) to clients who do not qualify for grant assistance but who have limited funding and identified housing condition defects.
- In preference to developing a Kickstart scheme in each district, there are significant benefits in developing the roll out of Kickstart into one Worcestershire countywide scheme under the supervision and management of the proposed new Home Improvement Agency.

5.6 It is recommended that Worcestershire local authorities should engage with Kickstart to role out the service to the County on the following basis:

- i. To develop a partnership with Kickstart as one countywide scheme, by submitting one bid / Local Delivery Plan for Worcestershire.
- ii. To offer Warwick and Stratford the opportunity to participate if they so wish.
- iii. To link the scheme with the proposed new arrangements for the commissioning of HIA services in Worcestershire.

- iv. To develop the scheme on the basis of there being one centrally staffed administration / management performance monitoring and promotion team based within the proposed new HIA structure.

5.7 The advantages of progressing a centralised Worcestershire scheme of engagement with Kickstart are seen to be:

- a. Reduced marketing, management and administration costs.
- b. Ability to embody within 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 Kickstart 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.

5.8 There is a likelihood that as time goes by, the availability of LA capital funds to provide discretionary grants and loans could potentially diminish and therefore the establishment of a Kickstart scheme will build confidence in the public to view it as a valued alternative and option to gradually supplement and if necessary eventually replace the availability of discretionary grants and loans. Kickstart will not be able to provide a complete solution due to the lengthy process involved and significant additional costs and therefore local authority own schemes are still an essential response to housing needs. In the meantime, it is proposed that local authorities will be able to operate their various individual grant schemes up to a locally agreed amount and develop the Kickstart scheme as an alternative option to clients who do not qualify or are unwilling to wait for a discretionary grant, or where the required level of work exceeds the local grant or loan ceiling.

5.9 The West Midlands Kickstart Interim Programme Manager, is currently working with all Local Authorities wishing to join the Partnership in the next 18 months with a view to helping Authorities prepare 'fit for purpose' Local Delivery Plans. The Local Delivery Plan serves three purposes:

- Firstly, it articulates commitment to the **attainment of the outcomes and outputs** associated with the Kickstart programme whilst tailoring local delivery to reflect local needs and priorities;
- Secondly, it is intended to support the **planning and design** of local programmes so that the Partnership as a whole can be confident that the forecast outcomes and outcomes contained within the Delivery Plan will be achieved to high **quality** standards and at a cost which represents **value for money**.
- Finally, the preparation of the Delivery Plan supports the putting in place of appropriate **performance monitoring and evaluation** arrangements so that progress towards the achievement of outputs is continuously monitored and the impacts of your programme accurately measured.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council will continue with the current level of funding that it provides the North Worcestershire Care & Repair Service. A key objective of the recommissioning is to attract additional funding as the enhanced services offered will meet key outcomes for partner agencies.
- 6.2 The delivery of the Kickstart 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 Kickstart.

7. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A new jointly commissioned contract will be entered into by the Council and appropriate revisions to policies will be made where required.

8. RISK MANGEMENT

- 8.1 The Council will not be in a position to deliver the enhanced level of services to older and disabled people unless it works in partnership with all of the main partners across the County.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 Delay in implementing Kickstart 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.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Building upon the strong countywide housing and support partnerships that exist, the recommissioning of a single countywide HIA provides a unique opportunity to improve and expand a range of services aimed at improving the independence of older and disabled residents.
- 9.2 A new HIA will bring together statutory and voluntary sector partners, which will be cost effective and innovative and assist the Council and its partners to meet statutory requirements and key outcomes.

10. CONSULTEES

All Worcestershire Local Authorities.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Lifetime Homes - see

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