

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET**  
**16<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2010**

**Recommissioning of Home Improvement Agency Services**

<b>OPEN</b>	
<b>SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:</b>	Improved Health & Wellbeing
<b>CORPORATE PLAN AIM:</b>	Enabling Community Wellbeing
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	Councillor Tracey Onslow
<b>DIRECTOR:</b>	Director of Planning & Regulatory Services
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Kate Bailey – Ext 2560 Kate.Bailey@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	Appendix 1 - Draft Specification for Worcestershire Home Improvement Agency Services Appendix 2 - Kickstart Local Delivery Plan  <i>The appendices to this report have been circulated electronically and a public inspection copy is available on request. (See front cover for details).</i>

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To update Members and agree on the proposal 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 Primary Care Trust and the six District Councils.
- 1.2 To update Members on the progress with joining the Kickstart programme.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**Cabinet is requested to DECIDE:**

- 2.1 **To agree the commencement of the new Countywide Home Improvement Agency from April 2010 in accordance with the specification at Appendix 1.**
- 2.2 **That the Director of Legal and Corporate Services, in consultation with the Director of Planning and Regulatory Services finalise and enter into the necessary contractual arrangements for the commencement of the new service.**

### 3. **BACKGROUND**

#### **National Context**

- 3.1 As outlined in the previous report of 26th March 2009, 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".

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.
- 3.2 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.

#### **Current position in Worcestershire**

- 3.3 As outlined in the previous report, it has been a longer standing commitment to bring together the two existing HIAs that have been operating in the county, namely the North Worcestershire HIA covering Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest and Festival Housing Group operating in the South Worcestershire HIA covering Wychavon and Worcester since January 2006. Cabinet have previously:
- Been apprised of the recommissioning process and delegated to Director of Planning & Regulatory Services (P&RS) authority to negotiate the details of the countywide recommissioning process with the other Worcestershire districts.
  - Agreed the continued use of revenue and capital funding for the new HIA that is currently paid to the North Worcestershire Care and Repair service.
  - Supported the roll out and implementation of the Kickstart programme.
- 3.4 But as the process for agreeing the new service provider has moved on it was felt appropriate to apprise Cabinet of the current position.

- 3.5 A report was taken to Chief Executives Panel in September 2008 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 District Councils the opportunity to identify good practice 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 District Council had received a grant allocation from the Regional Assembly.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 A Project Management Group, consisting of District Councils, Worcestershire County Council, Supporting People, the Primary Care Trust 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 Cabinet in March 2010 for approval.
- 3.8 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. From this work 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 Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) rights. This in turn would benefit service users who wouldn't, in the majority of cases, even experience a change of personnel in the transition period and would therefore get some continuity in case management.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 Discussion has taken place with a representative from the County Procurement Officers Group and they will continue to support the process and take all steps to ensure compliance with procurement rules before entering into necessary and contractual arrangements.
- 3.12 The current Care and Repair Agency service provided by Redditch Borough Council currently provides up to £400k of disabled facilities grants to the occupiers in the Private Sector, with Wyre Forest Community Housing providing services for DFGs directly to social housing tenants (a further 400k) and decent homes assistance (120k) to owner occupiers. Under the countywide structure the new HIA will provide all the grants and loans currently available. Discussions have been held with Community Housing regarding this proposed change and they are in consultation with Festival Housing Group regarding the new arrangements for the delivery of grants to their own tenants from April 2010.

**4. KEY ISSUES**

**Services To Be Delivered By The HIA**

- 4.1 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.
- 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 (please see Specification at Appendix One). 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:
- Information, advice and signposting
  - 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
  - Kickstart loans
- 4.3 Much of the Council's work on Disabled Facilities Grants across tenure and other housing assistance to the private sector will continue to be channelled through such partnership arrangements.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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 equity release loan facilities. The funding for this scheme is held centrally by Birmingham City Council and administered by them on behalf of the partnership.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 The Kickstart scheme will introduce a mix of equity and non-equity products for those people needing to undertake decent homes work to their property. The equity products are secured against equity in a person's home. The scheme is anticipated to require support of a capital resource of £1,629,588 over the three year programme

with commencement targeted to coincide with the implementation new Countywide Home Improvement Agency from April 2010 . The Partnership envisages that based upon the projected available funding, the service will be able to provide up to 30 Non Equity (such as unsecured loans) and 36 Equity Loans in Year 1 building up to 48 Equity Loans and 50 Non Equity loans by year over the three year programme. The funding requirement also includes a proportion set aside for revenue costs as this work will require additional staff within the Home Improvement Agency and funding set aside to pay for the provision of the financial advice, currently delivered by Art Homes. Funding has already been identified for the Worcestershire Authorities to join this scheme through the Regional Housing Pot allocation made in 2008/09 and 2009/10 of £918,065 and this funding has been rolled forward into 2010/11. Due to wider funding cuts there is no further allocation for 2010/11 but it is hoped further funds will be made available for the scheme in 2011/12. The existing resources are sufficient to fund staff and associated expenses for the three year duration of the contract.

- 4.8 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.
- 4.9 Within the North of the County there has been a Code of Practice for Adaptations in draft format for a significant amount of time but 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 and it is the intention of the Project Management Group to revise and reintroduce this Code.
- 4.10 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.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Council will continue with the current level of funding that it provides the North Worcestershire Care & Repair Service within the service level agreement of £50,000 in addition to a 10% fee on all capital works. A key objective of the new organisation will be to attract additional funding as the enhanced services offered will meet key outcomes for partner agencies and the agency can begin to offer similar services to non-eligible households for a charge.
- 5.2 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. This funding is held centrally by Birmingham City Council on behalf of the Kickstart partnership.
- 5.3 Additional funding has also been identified by Supporting People to both pump prime the service and develop the Housing Liaison Officer posts (of £400,000) over two years in addition to the First Stop pump priming funding to assist in establishing a signposting and advice service on housing options to older and vulnerable residents. The funding for First Stop and the SP funds will be paid directly to the new HIA in addition to the existing SP contribution of £187,381.

- 5.4 The current capital programme includes, from 2010/11 to 2012/13, £2.4 million (800k per year) and a proposed 120k for housing assistance in 2010/11. It is intended that the 10% fee currently paid to Redditch and Wyre Forest will be passed to the Home Improvement Agency although the administration of the capital grant will remain within the Private Sector Housing team. The Council's capital programme is reviewed annually on a three yearly rolling programme and contributions may therefore be subject to change.

**6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 A new jointly commissioned contract will be entered into by the Council and appropriate revisions to policies and procedures will be made where appropriate. Work is currently being undertaken to revise the Housing Assistance Policy and Code of Practice.

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 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 and benefits from the additional resources being made available to the HIA through Supporting People, Kickstart and the First Stop grant.
- 7.2 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. This funding will be critical if, at some stage in the future, other funding opportunities cease to be available to assist vulnerable home owners improve their homes.

**8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken to cover the role of the Private Sector Housing team in relation to their work with the Home Improvement Agency and for the Housing Assistance Policy that determines eligibility under the current grant / loan regime and it identified that there are no discernable impacts on the six equality strands.

**9. CONCLUSION**

- 9.1 The recommissioning of the HIA will provide an opportunity to enhance partnership working, to pool resources and attract additional ones and expand a range of services aimed at improving the independence of older and disabled residents.

**10. CONSULTEES**

All Worcestershire Local Authorities.  
Wyre Forest Community Housing  
Director of Resources  
Director of Legal and Corporate Services

11. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Lifetime Homes - see

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

Previous Cabinet report 26th March 2009