

**Public  
Key Decision – Yes**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency -  
Extension of Shared Service Agreement

**Meeting/Date:** Overview and Scrutiny (Customer & Partnerships) –  
7th April 2022  
Cabinet – 21st April 2022

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor Ryan Fuller – Executive Councillor for  
Housing, Planning and Economic Development

**Report by:** Claudia Deeth, Community Resilience Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

This report provides an update on the performance of the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (CHIA) and provides details of the proposed extension to the shared service agreement for the service.

The shared service operates across Huntingdonshire, South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City, and the agreement between these 3 Councils has been operating since 2012. It has overseen the provision of 630 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) for residents in Huntingdonshire since 2018.

The shared service agreement remains extensively unchanged, and it is recommended that the agreement should be extended for a further 3 years.

### **Recommendation:**

The Cabinet agrees that the shared service agreement is extended for a further 3 years with authority delegated to the Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing and Economic Development to finalise the agreement.

## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the performance of Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (CHIA) and to seek authorisation to extend the shared service agreement with CHIA for a further 3 years.

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The shared service agreement has been operating since 2012 and each year Overview and Scrutiny Panel has been provided with an update on the performance of CHIA to ensure that it is operating effectively and providing a valuable service to residents in Huntingdonshire.
- 2.2 Due to the pandemic and changes in the management structure at the District Council, Overview and Scrutiny have not received a performance report since 2020. This information is therefore included within this report.
- 2.3 The current shared service agreement is due to expire on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 and Officers are seeking a mandate from Cabinet to extend the agreement.

## **3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS**

- 3.1 HDC could choose not to renew the shared service agreement with the CHIA, but HDC will still have a statutory duty to provide DFGs. If the contract is not extended, the number of DFG applications might decrease and waiting time increase, leading to possible complaints, as residents are required to submit applications, appoint contractors, and oversee works themselves. It is more likely however that a third party will fill the void potentially charging higher fees than the CHIA and therefore further increasing the pressure on the Council's DFG budget.
- 3.2 Other options include returning the service in-house, which would not have the same economies of scale or resilience as the shared service or extending the agreement for a different period of time.
- 3.3 The shared service has enabled Huntingdonshire, South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City Councils to each receive their allocations and by agreement then use them to fund DFGs where there is the greatest need.

## **4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

- 4.1 The Panel discussed the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency – Extension of Shared Service Agreement at its meeting on 7th April 2022.
- 4.2 Following questions from Councillor Mrs Wilson and Councillor West, the Panel heard that although the DFG were down last year when compared to the previous year, these numbers can fluctuate on an annual basis. Furthermore, the Panel were advised that due to the shared nature of the service, there was confidence that both capacity and funding would be sufficient to cope with demand.

- 4.3 Having received an enquiry from Councillor Gardener, the Panel were advised that although the agreement presented remained extensively unchanged, there had been implementation of a new IT system and support, which had resulted in greater efficiencies for the service.
- 4.4 The Panel welcomed the report and encourage the Cabinet to endorse the recommendation contained within the report.

## 5. PERFORMANCE OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

- 5.1 During 2020 - 21, CHIA assisted 147 residents living in Huntingdonshire, to enable them to stay in their homes. This is compared to 227 in 2018/19 and 256 in 2019/20, with the reduction being attributed to fewer referrals due to the pandemic.

Table 1: Number of Grants completed

Type of Grant	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-to date
Number of DFG completed	252	143	127
Total funded through a DFG	£2,269,074	£1,286,173	£1,096,286
Assistance grants completed	0	0	0
Total grant funding through the SPA	0	0	0
Relocation grants completed	4	4	2
Total funding for relocation grants	£22,622	£16,778	£7,041
<b>Total number of grants</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Total spend</b>	<b>£2,291,696</b>	<b>£1,302,951</b>	<b>£1,1033,327</b>

- 5.2 Prior to the pandemic, the performance of the CHIA had improved since Autumn 2017, when a new manager was appointed, and an improvement plan was introduced. The time taken to complete a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) reduced considerably meaning that people received the support they needed much sooner. The time taken to complete a Disabled Facilities Grant also reduced considerably, from 40 weeks in 2017/18 to 16 weeks in 2019/2020 for grants less than £10,000. For larger works costing more than £10,000 the average time taken also reduced from 57 weeks in 2017/18 to 20 in 2019/20.
- 5.3 The past two years have been challenging for the CHIA. First with the lockdown and inability to undertake works within residents' homes and then following on from the easing of restrictions, the availability of contractors to carry out works and the lack of supply of materials. This has resulted in some jobs being handed back by contractors and others being significantly delayed. Waiting times for works have therefore increased to an average of 22 weeks for works up to £10,000, and 38 weeks for larger works. This situation is reflected nationally, with many agencies facing similar challenges. On a positive note, the CHIA has recently appointed 17 new contractors since November 2021 which will help with the backlog and reduce waiting times back to pre-covid levels. This situation will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the CHIA Board as part of its performance monitoring.

- 5.4 Before the issues associated with the pandemic, which are outside of the control of the CHIA, the performance of the Agency was going from strength to strength. Frances Swann, the CHIA Manager, has also been recognised as a National Inspirational Leader by Foundations (the leading resource for Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Improvement Agencies in England). The Agency also received Audit Assurance in 2021.
- 5.5 Further information on the performance of the CHIA can be found by visiting [Cambroshire Home Improvement Agency \(cambshia.org\)](http://Cambroshire Home Improvement Agency (cambshia.org))
- 5.6 The CHIA's customer base is wide ranging. DFGs help meet the needs of older people, physically disabled adults, those with learning disabilities, physically disabled children and ex service personnel.
- 5.7 Cambs HIA has been working in partnership with Environmental Health across the 3 District Councils to design and implement a new Information Technology (IT) software package called Tascomi. Tascomi which, was acquired by IDOX in 2019 is a national company specialising in cloud based Public Protection software. Cambs HIA staff have learned how to design IT workflows to ensure the new system is lean and maximises "E working" opportunities, providing a better all-round cloud-based IT solution. The system went live on 16th March 2021.
- 5.8 The CHIA also referred customers to other services to receive support and assistance including fire safety checks, housing needs teams, welfare benefits advice, occupational therapists and adult care services.

## **6. SHARED SERVICE AGREEMENT**

- 6.1 The existing shared service agreement has been in place for 3 years having been renewed on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 for a further 3 years and therefore expires on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.
- 6.2 The CHIA is resilient and is operating with a small rolling revenue surplus despite the removal of revenue funding from Cambs County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group.
- 6.3 The draft agreement remains extensively unchanged.

## **7. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 7.1 The continuation of the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency is a positive benefit to the Council. The Agency has provided support for many residents over the years to enable them to live healthy, independent and safe in their own homes through the provision of disabled adaptations and repairs. The Council benefits hugely from this service and often links in with other projects, such as making homes more energy efficient and providing Trusted Assessors to help speed up the process in terms of referrals from Occupational Health.
- 7.2 Without the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency, the Council would offer a lesser service that would only administer grants without

providing the support and project management that the CHIA provides. This would mean that applicants, who are often vulnerable, would have to submit their own applications, appoint contractors and oversee works themselves. The one-to-one support provided by the CHIA in terms of signposting to relevant organisations, providing advice, project managing adaptations/repairs and working with health and social partners would be lost.

- 7.3 As stated above, if the agreement is not extended and the service is not provided, the number of DFG applications might decrease and fewer residents would be supported to continue to live safely in their homes. This could result in long waiting times during which time, applicants would be at risk of incidents such as falls and the risk of hospitalisation increased. Alternatively, a third party will fill the void potentially charging higher fees than the CHIA and therefore further increasing the pressure on the Council's DFG budget.

## **8. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- 8.1 Cabinet is requested to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to finalise the extension of the shared service agreement to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

## **9. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND / OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- 9.1 The Huntingdonshire Corporate Plan 2018-2022 includes a vision to 'support people to improve their health and wellbeing'. There is a performance indicator linked to this vision which is to monitor 'the average time between dates of referral for Disabled Facilities Grants to practical completion for minor jobs up to £10k'. One of the five themes in the Annual Governance Statement is Morbidity/Growing numbers of years of ill health – impacting on people's ability to be self-reliant and generating additional cost through support needs.

## **10. CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 Consultation with CHIA Board has been ongoing.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 No legal implications have been identified.

## **12. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 The CHIA is funded by fee income – it charges 15% fees on all works completed – and a small revenue contribution by top-slicing the 3 Councils Better Care Fund allocations. In 2020/21 and in the current financial year no revenue funding has been required by HDC. The 15% fee is lower than in East Cambs (20%) and Fenland (27%) meaning the DFG budget can go further, and in Huntingdonshire it means the Council's capital

contribution is less than would be the case if fees were higher. As set out above, if the agreement is not extended and the service is not continued, the number of DFG applications and therefore grants might decrease, waiting times and complaints may increase or more likely a third party will fill the void potentially charging higher fees than the HIA and therefore further increasing the pressure on the Council's DFG budget.

### **13. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The support provided by CHIA to residents enables them to remain living safely in their homes. Adaptations can reduce hospital admissions and delay moves into residential care.

### **14. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

- 14.1 The CHIA is operating effectively and is supporting hundreds of people every year to receive the adaptations they require in a cost-effective way. It is recommended that Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Economic Development is delegated authority to extend the shared service agreement for a further 3 years. A 3-year period is considered appropriate as it provides a degree of certainty for the service whilst enabling the position to be reviewed in 3 years' times if circumstances change. The Agreement also enables any party to terminate the Agreement by giving notice – 6 months' notice if such notice is given between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September or terminating at the end of the next financial year if such notice is given between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 31<sup>st</sup> March.

### **15. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Draft shared service agreement

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