

**SAFER HOMES SCHEME
(Report by the Head of Housing Services)**

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet to agree to the release of £25,000 agreed in the medium term financial plan, but subject to COMT and the Cabinet release, to pick up mainstream funding for a Safer Homes (Handyperson) Scheme in Huntingdonshire.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The provision of a Safer Homes Scheme was a jointly agreed LPSA (Reward Grant) priority for Huntingdonshire. Huntingdonshire was the only district in Cambridgeshire without access to such a service. The provision of a Safer Homes/Handyperson scheme ensures that older and vulnerable households have access to a service to carry out small repair jobs free of charge or at low cost in order to maintain safety within the home.
- 2.2 The scheme is available to owner occupiers and private tenants. It consists of an initial telephone assessment by the Scheme Coordinator to take details and establish the type of repair and whether it is something that the scheme can assist with. If not and other issues are identified the client will be signposted to other agencies, for example whether all eligible benefits are being claimed, to the falls prevention co-ordinator or whether there may be a need for a larger adaptation to the home.
- 2.3 If relevant works are identified a home visit is made to agree what work will be undertaken. Examples of the type of works the scheme carries out include:
- Fitting of grab rails and banisters
 - Securing loose carpets and flooring
 - Door bells
 - Key Safes
 - Light bulbs/Security lights
 - Fitting curtain rails
 - Moving furniture
 - Fixing door chains, locks, spy holes.

2.4 Key benefits and outcomes of the scheme include:

- A reduction in the number of accidents in the home
- A reduction in the number of admissions to hospital
- An improvement in hospital discharge rates
- Reduction in the fear of falling
- Decrease in the disrepair of properties
- Decrease in the number of vulnerable households falling prey to fraudulent contractors and cold callers.

2.5 During the LPSA process in 2009 the Government announced a bidding opportunity to ensure nationwide access to a handy person service. The Huntingdonshire bid was successful but funding was limited to £50,000 per year for a two-year period to cover establishment and running costs. The LPSA grant would have been for a three-year period, reverting to mainstreamed funding thereafter. An MTP bid was made and agreed in order to mainstream £25,000 of funding to continue with a scheme from 2011/12 onwards.

2.6 A scheme was established with Luminus and Age Concern (now Age UK) in February 2010. This has taken a holistic approach with 200 assessments being undertaken and 160 jobs completed since the scheme started. There is clearly a demand for a service of this type in Huntingdonshire.

3.0 Considerations

3.1 The scheme has delivered good outcomes and has proved that there is a demand for this type of scheme.

3.2 Officers consider that there is significant potential to build the capacity of the scheme, drive up the outcomes and reduce costs while improving value for money if a scheme continues.

3.3 The Safer Homes scheme clearly meets the Council's priority to support vulnerable households to remain living independently.

3.4 The MTP bid was for £25,000 which will enable a scheme to continue providing assessments and repairs. Officers are seeking additional funding from NHS Cambridgeshire and Supporting People to extend the scheme. Both organisations acknowledge that this types of service provides excellent value for money and contributes to their objectives.

3.5 These external partners are more likely to provide funding if the service continues and can be seen to be delivering the expected outcomes with reduced costs. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the scheme would be carried out.

4.0 Implications

- 4.1 Financial – Potentially in excess of 200 vulnerable households each year would benefit from the scheme. Not to fund the scheme would make a saving in the MTP but in real terms is likely to increase costs in other areas, i.e. housing disrepair, hospital admissions, health and social care costs.
- 4.2 Legal – There is no legal obligation to run a Safer Homes Scheme.
- 4.3 Staffing – No HDC staff are directly employed by the scheme.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 A clear need exists for this type of scheme to support vulnerable people and it has delivered the expected outcomes.
- 5.2 In order to improve value for money it is proposed to build capacity while reducing costs and to bring our scheme in line with the scheme in Cambridge and South Cambs.
- 5.3 It is hoped that a commitment to this scheme by the district council will result in match funding being obtained from partner agencies.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet agree to release funding to continue with a Safer Homes scheme as a contribution towards the Council's priority to support vulnerable households to live independently.

Background Papers:

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