

**HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SHARED SERVICE REVIEW AND DISABLED
FACILITIES GRANT BUDGET
(Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being))**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 4th June 2013, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) considered a report by the Housing Strategy Manager detailing the outcome of a review of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) shared service following one year of its operation and the ongoing demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).
- 1.2 The Deputy Executive Leader was in attendance at the meeting, together with Councillor T V Rogers. This report summarises the Panel's discussions.

2. THE PANEL'S DISCUSSIONS

- 2.1 The HIA is the Council's first shared service. Whilst some problems have been experienced in the first 6 months, the service currently is operating as intended and has since exceeded expectations. The Council has made a commitment to meet demand for DFGs but there are considerable difficulties in forecasting future levels of demand and the financial impact upon the Council.
- 2.2 DFGs are only awarded for adaptation works in excess of £1,000. Significant progress has been made against the HIA's agreed key objectives and further development work is planned over the course of the ensuing year. Attempts will be made to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service; for example, by introducing competitive tendering for equipment and the procurement of adaptation works from local businesses.
- 2.3 Waiting times for Occupational Therapists (OT) have successfully been reduced from eight months in March 2012 to four months in March 2013. Despite the improvements made to reduce OT waiting times, the Panel is keen to see further reductions in the future. Four months is likely to appear to applicants to be a significant time to wait. The HIA Manager intends to prioritise further improving these times. In addition, there is some concern over the impending dissolution of Cambridgeshire Community Services and future OT service provision. Meetings are being held with relevant parties to address this issue.
- 2.4 On a related matter, clarification has been received that the additional Surveyor recruited to assist with the current backlog of casework in Huntingdonshire has been appointed on a temporary contract.
- 2.5 The Panel has discussed a number of matters including the feedback received from clients who have had works carried out on their homes, which reveals very high levels of satisfaction with the service they have received. Members have also considered a suggestion that homeowners might be encouraged to utilise the value of their properties as a means of funding adaptations in the future, the reasons why only 70% of DFG applications are fully completed, the point at which OT assessments are undertaken, the charges placed on properties where

owner occupiers receive a DFG in excess of £10,000 for adaptations relating to garage or outbuilding conversions and/or extensions and the point in the process at which applicants are means tested. On the latter, the Panel has expressed the view that means testing should take place at the start of the process so that works are not undertaken on cases that do not proceed because the applicant is not eligible for assistance.

2.6 With regard to the DFG budget, clarification has been received that “HIA earned fee income” refers to the 10% of the capital grant that the Council pays to the HIA for running the service. Comment has been made upon the need for the Council to review its commitment to financing DFG adaptations in the future. It has also been suggested that the budget forecast should be reviewed to reflect a more realistic view of demand. Past trends show a continuous increase in demand and, given projected demographic changes, this increase is likely to continue in the future.

2.7 A review of contractor lists will be undertaken in 2013/14. It is suggested that the option of establishing an in-house service to carry out adaptation works should be explored.

2.8 The Panel has endorsed the recommendations contained within the report by the Housing Strategy Manager.

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 The Cabinet is invited to take into account the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) as part of its deliberations on the report by the Housing Strategy Manager.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Minutes and Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 4th June 2013.

Contact Officer: Miss H Ali, Democratic Services Officer

☎ 01480 388006

✉ Habbiba.Ali@huntingdonshire.gov.uk