

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

20 March 2013

AUTHOR/S: Director of Housing

HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY 12 MONTH REVIEW

Purpose

1. To provide the Housing Portfolio Holder with an update on the progress of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) 12 months after the establishment of the shared service.
2. This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

3. That the Housing Portfolio Holder notes this report.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The HIA has been established with a three year programme and good progress has been made in the first year. A decision on the future direction of the HIA will not be required until 2014.

Background

5. The Council took the decision in 2011 to set up a new shared service to run the Home Improvement Agency on behalf of Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.
6. Cambs HIA went live April 2012 and brought together formerly separate teams from the three councils under one management (Cambridge City) hosted at South Cambridgeshire Hall and with IT support from Huntingdonshire.

Considerations

7. The set up and transition phase which included the TUPE transfer of staff to Cambridge City, some redundancies and the recruitment of a new manager all went smoothly.
8. The objectives set for the new service were:
 - To achieve operational savings
 - To improved resilience
 - To provide a platform for improved performance over time
9. The operational costs in 2010/11 for all three 3 councils was £695,000. The operational costs in 2012/13 for the new shared HIA is £516,000 (7% under budget) the objective to achieve savings has therefore been met.

10. The new team is now fully operational as a single service with a shared IT system. There have already been examples where staff capacity has been used flexibly across the district boundaries and increased caseloads have been accommodated. The objective to improve resilience has therefore been met also.
11. The focus in the first year has been on integrating the team and establishing new shared IT and working procedures. A key learning point is that combining three services into one is a huge challenge and was perhaps underestimated. There was therefore a slower start than hoped for but the team is now fully in place and working together.
12. There were also some early IT problems but the shared data system between Cambs HIA and council's grants officers is now operational and has been positively received.
13. Joint working with Occupational Therapists has started e.g. the establishment of a shared DFG leaflet and simplified procedures. More joint working with OTs is planned.
14. The platform for improved service has therefore been established.

Options

15. A revised Business Plan is planned for 2014. This will follow workshops with staff and stakeholders during 2013 to review the work completed to date and to identify areas for further improvement.
16. This will be preceded by some further fine tuning of working procedures to maximise efficiency.
17. Whilst the operational costs have been held within budget, there has been a slowdown in fees coming in. This will form the focus of activity for 2013/14.

Implications

18. Financial	Operational cost efficiencies have been made but effort is now required to ensure that fee generation is increased and maintained.
Legal	The Council has a duty to meet the needs of disabled residents in the district and to oversee the spending of the Disabled Facilities Grant.
Staffing	None
Risk Management	The HIA Board is working closely with the HIA Manager to ensure that fee income targets are met during 2013/14
Equality and Diversity	The work of the HIA is aimed at meeting the needs of disabled people.
Equality Impact	Completed for original policy proposal.

Assessment completed	
Climate Change	None

Consultations

19. None

Consultation with Children and Young People

20. None

Effect on Strategic Aims

21. We will make sure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer outstanding and sustainable quality of life for our residents. Assisting people with disabilities to live independently in their own home is a critical factor in providing and maintaining sustainable communities.

Conclusions / Summary

22. A fully operational and functioning shared home improvement agency service has been established in the first 12 months. Work is now underway to further improve the efficiency of the service.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

None

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