



REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder
LEAD OFFICER: Director of Housing

15 October 2014

Home Improvement Agency Update

Purpose

1. This report provides the Housing Portfolio Holder with a progress review of the Cambs Home Improvement Agency (CHIA) shared service following two years of operation. The report also considers the impact of the Better Care Fund and the ongoing demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).
2. This is not a key decision but it requires the approval of the Housing Portfolio Holder to ensure that the development of this service is in line with our partners in Huntingdonshire and Cambridge City.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Housing Portfolio Holder approves:
 - a) the extension of the current Shared Service Agreement by a further twelve months to 31 March 2016.
 - b) the adoption of the key performance indicator:
Average time (in weeks) between date of referral to practical completion for minor jobs up to £10k
 - c) the preparation of an Outline Business Case for the expansion to a County-wide service, with final agreement being subject to agreement by the Cabinet in 2015.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The shared service CHIA has been successful in meeting its initial aims and objectives within two years, with potential to achieve further efficiencies both internally and externally into the future.
5. The opportunity to broaden the shared service to include the other districts within Cambridgeshire provides an opportunity to deliver further efficiencies and benefits for commissioners and customers.
6. The current three-year Agreement runs out in March 2015. In order to allow time to work up the proposals to deliver a countywide shared service an extension to the current Agreement is required.
7. The under £10k works are the majority of the smaller works completed and this fits with our collective priority to streamline/optimize DFG completion times.

Background

8. The CHIA shared service was developed during 2011/12 in partnership with Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Councils, Cambs HIA went 'live' on 1st April 2012.
9. CHIA is a partnership based shared service with staff being employed by Cambridge City Council, the main office located within South Cambridgeshire's offices in Cambourne (with hot desks at other locations) and IT systems and support provided by Huntingdonshire District Council.
10. One of the main aims of the CHIA is to help people live independently by helping them to access Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 sets out the Council's duties to provide DFGs. On receipt of a valid application, the Council must award a DFG for work to achieve one or more of a set of purposes defined by statute. The DFG application process is normally triggered on receipt of a referral from the Occupational Therapist (OT) Service. The grant will fund aids and adaptations like ramps, stair lifts and level access showers. The maximum DFG is £30k and DFGs for adults are subject to a means test. DFGs for children are not means tested. The Council must be satisfied that a DFG is necessary and appropriate and that to carry it out is reasonable and practicable. At the current time, the responsibility for validating and approving DFGs for South Cambridgeshire sits with the Strategic Housing Service at this Council.
11. DFGs form part of a wider strategic approach to helping improve the health and wellbeing of people in South Cambridgeshire. Along with other low level interventions, DFGs can enable elderly and disabled people to live independently and help to avoid costly emergency hospital admissions and inappropriate and expensive care placements. DFGs are therefore a 'preventative' service and help to implement the aims of the countywide Health and Well Being Strategy.
12. During 2013/14 the drive from Central Government has been towards the introduction of the Care Bill. As part of this, the Government has established the Better Care Fund (BCF). This is a pooled Health and Adult Social Care budget. All of the funding that is due to be pooled together is currently allocated to services across the health and social care systems. The Government's contribution to DFG capital funding is also being pooled within this new BCF 'pot'. The DFG element of the "Single Capital Pot" for this financial year has been received. It is as yet unclear how and whether this will be paid to us in future years.
13. The aim of the BCF is to help transform services to enable a number of National outcomes to be achieved. These include 7 day services to support hospital discharge, more effective preventative services, better sharing of information between agencies, joint assessments etc. The BCF for Cambridgeshire is £37.7m and a joint strategy is being developed for how the money will be allocated in the future, and how the national outcomes will be achieved. The shared HIA is clearly well placed to support delivery of these aims and there may be opportunity for further development of the HIA service given the preventative outcomes they help to deliver.

Considerations

14. Following a slow start to the shared service in 2012/13, due to the complexities of the service and the challenge of bringing together three very different operational teams, service delivery has improved significantly over year two.

15. When the CHIA was formed, a number of key objectives were agreed. Progress on each of these is set out below:

Deliver cost savings over time for both district and county commissioners.

16. It was predicted that at the end of Year 2 the service would break even or make a small surplus. Year-end figures showed that the shared service broke even in 2013/14.
17. Cambridgeshire County Council has continued to revenue grant fund the shared service in addition to the Fenland and East Cambs services and advocates the development of a County-wide service over the next two years. This would provide additional scope to increase economies of scale and allow funding to be more effectively targeted towards relative need across the County.
18. It is anticipated that cost savings for the district council will be achieved as the services continues to develop, with expected savings for County commissioners to be delivered through further expansion to a Countywide shared service in future years.

Improve operational resilience and opportunities for cross boundary working.

19. Operational resilience has improved overall with the staff team being able to provide cover for each other at times of sickness and annual leave.
20. Discussions have been held between County Council Commissioners and Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Councils about whether or not they would wish to join the shared service. The benefits to South Cambridgeshire from further expansion of the CHIA into Fenland and/or East Cambridgeshire are further improvements in efficiency and a more robust service. As one of the primary revenue funders of the service the County Council are very keen to progress with this to achieve better value for money. This will need further exploration over the coming year.
21. The objective to improve resilience and work across boundaries has been met through the development of the CHIA and there are further opportunities to increase this through development of a County-wide service over time.

Provide a platform for improved performance and efficiency over time.

22. The CHIA Management Board is keen to develop closer working with both district colleagues and partners in Health and Adult Social Care. These include proposals for closer working with OTs and other services i.e. Handyperson services, hospital discharge teams, etc. The scope for broadening the service across East Cambridgeshire and Fenland provides significant opportunities for improved future efficiency.
23. The full grant allocation was spent by the Council during 2013/14 which is evidence of the new system working well.
24. We have a collective priority to streamline/optimize DFG completion times.
25. Works of under £10k are the majority of the smaller works completed. This is in line with our partner councils. It is therefore recommended that this one particular PI will be monitored as a way of tracking the overall improvement in the speed of the service for customers:

“Average time (in weeks) between date of referral to practical completion for minor jobs up to £10k”

26. In addition, customer satisfaction has improved within South Cambridgeshire and the latest figures for the first three months of 2014 are illustrative of this

CHIA Customer Satisfaction in South Cambridgeshire (January to March 2014)*

Has work met your expectations?	Fully 84% (16)	Partly 16% (3)
Has the work provided Value for Money?	Yes 89.5% (17)	No 10.5% (2)
Overall are you satisfied?	Yes 89.5% (17)	No 10.5% (2)
How do you rate:	Good/very good	Below average/Poor
The caseworker advice?	89.5% (17)	10.6% (2)
The surveyor's advice?	89.5% (17)	10.6% (2)
Communications with the HIA?	79.0% (15)	5.3% (1)
Communications with the contractor?	84.2% (16)	5.3% (1)
Attitude of the contractor?	89.5% (17)	0
Tidiness of the contractor?	84.2% (16)	15.8% (3)
Time taken?	79.0% (15)	10.6% (2)
Quality of the work?	94.7% (18)	0
How well you were kept informed?	73.7% (14)	0

*Overall, 26 jobs completed 19 responses received (73%)

27. The platform for improved performance and efficiency has therefore been established and can be monitored using the suggested key PI and the customer satisfaction returns.

Options

28. The current three-year Shared Service HIA Agreement runs out in March 2015. This agreement requires review and further development if it is to include potentially two other local authority HIA services in future. The Agreement provides for extension year on year with the agreement of all parties and will require at least one further year extension in order to prepare an outline business case for a wider shared service across Cambridgeshire. It is proposed to renew the agreement for one further year.
29. Officers will work with the CHIA Manager on an outline business case which will be subject to Member endorsement across all three councils in 2015.

30. Huntingdonshire DC and Cambridge City Council have already approved these recommendations.

Implications

31. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered.
32. Service delivery rates over recent years, plus a prediction for this year is as follows:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 Predicted DFGs generated in year
No. DFGs completed	59	52	86	75
Total spend on DFGs £000	607	530	665	670

33. A DFG budget of £670,000 a year has been included in the Council's approved capital programme. The current programme covers the period to the end of 2018/19.

Legal

34. The Legal & Democratic Services Manager has confirmed that the Shared Service Agreement can be extended for a further year by formal minute and letter.
35. Any expansion of the service will require a fresh Legal Agreement to be developed by all partners.

Staffing

36. None

Risk Management

37. The inclusion of the Government element of DFG capital within the Better Care Fund (BCF) from 2015/16 provides an element of risk, as while current Government plans are to stipulate that DFG capital must be cascaded to housing authorities, this may change over time. This will be monitored by officers.
38. With regard to the development of a Countywide Home Improvement Agency there is a risk that not all Councils will sign up to this. There follows then a risk that County Council revenue funding may be withdrawn, or reduced as a result as they support a County-wide approach.

Equality and Diversity

39. None

Climate Change

40. None

Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)

41. Customer satisfaction remains high with the Council carrying out quarterly satisfaction surveys. These are monitored and reported in the CHIA Annual Report.

Effect on Strategic Aims

42. Aim 3 – Wellbeing – work with GPs & partners to link health services and improve the health of our communities.

Background Papers

None

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