

21 July 2023**TITLE OF REPORT: A new 'home improvement and assistance' service**

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek the support of the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) on proposals for the implementation and subsequent development of a new 'home improvement and assistance' service for Gateshead.

Background

2. The Housing Review, reported to Cabinet in November 2020, confirmed the need to review several key housing services. The Council's home adaptation's function was highlighted as one of those services that required review and improvement. The subsequent Housing Improvement Programme, reported to SHB in October 2021, confirmed an intention to review the home adaptations service as one of several major improvement workstreams.
3. To support the review, Foundations, the UK government appointed body to oversee the development of home improvement services (often called Home Improvement Agencies, or HIA's), was commissioned by the Council in December 2022.
4. Foundations have provided expertise and capacity in progressing the review of the Council's current home adaptations service. The results of the review, together with several proposals for service improvement, including the creation of a new home improvement and assistance service, or HIA, is attached at appendix 1.
5. Prior to completion of the review, meetings had taken place between Foundations, key staff and stakeholders. Feedback from Members was also taken into account following a presentation of the initial draft review findings and proposed recommendations at the SHB in April 2023.
6. The attached final report from Foundations was discussed at Strategic Housing Board on 6th July 2023, and the Board agreed to proceed in taking forward the recommendations to Cabinet, subject to support from the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Need for Review

- a) National Policy Context
7. The 'People at the Heart of Care' White Paper, published by the government in December 2021, specifically references a range of expectations in promoting and maintaining independent living through the availability of Disabled Facilities Grant

(DFG), improved use of technology and digital tools to support independent living, a need to focus more on developing minor repairs services, and the need to 'join up' more effectively health, social care and housing services both strategically and operationally. The White Paper stresses that every decision about care, should be a decision about housing. There is a recognition from government of the need to improve and increase housing options to enable independent living.

8. The government published new guidance on the delivery of DFG's in March 2022. The guidance was produced in collaboration with Foundations and is also applicable to Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funded adaptations. The guidance confirms:
 - How housing (including Registered Providers), social care and health can work well together to provide more seamless and person-centred support.
 - Better use of powers placed on Council's under the Regulatory Reform Order (2002) and the need for a fit for purpose Home Assistance Policy.
 - The need for integrated teams within Council's to oversee the whole end to end adaptations process.
 - Improved application processes.
 - Improved commissioning and contract management.
 - Better use of assistive technology to help people to live safely and independently.

The guidance re-confirms its statutory underpinning, together with the requirements and obligations placed on Council's in providing support for home adaptations and independent living.

b) Current Service Performance

9. A range of measures confirm the need for a significantly improved service.
 - There is a current backlog of over 300 applications waiting assessment by an Occupational Therapist (OT); this has been consistent for some time.
 - Timescales to complete the adaptations process, from stage 1-4, are more than government benchmark standards.
 - Costs of adaptations are continuing to increase significantly and there is a need to ensure better value for money through improved contract management, design and procurement.
 - There is no customer satisfaction data.
10. Foundations have undertaken an end-to-end process review. This exercise has confirmed the need for major improvements in:
 - service access and the application process.
 - case management and ownership.
 - process simplifications including reduced service handovers.
 - clearer accountability and responsibilities including revised job roles.
 - significantly improved IT systems support.

11. Foundations recommend the production of an improvement plan that will ensure the creation of a fit for purpose service at an early opportunity.

Proposals for Service Improvement

12. The Foundations review identifies significant scope for improvement by fundamentally redesigning how the work is done. Rather than a series of incremental improvements, Foundations have recommended the adoption of completely new service model with the establishment of a new home improvement and assistance service (or HIA) for Gateshead, responsible for providing both DFG and HRA funded adaptations to homes.
13. The proposal would be to 'lift and shift' the HIA model given it is well established across the UK, is proven, and has evidenced achievement of required performance levels.
14. Key features of the proposed home improvement and assistance service (or HIA) include:
 - A single, multidisciplinary, and in-house team, responsible for the whole end-to-end adaptations process and providing a person-centred, tenure blind service.
 - The team would comprise of case managers, OT's, technical expertise and administrative support.
 - It would have increased capacity, with staffing proposals and levels based in current demand, and an assessment of the required skills needed for service improvement.
 - Additional staffing costs could be met from capitalisation, and therefore would be unlikely to impact on the General Fund.
 - A near total redesign of job roles and responsibilities requiring organisational change.
 - Potential additional roles including handypersons, social prescriber, resettlement, and hospital discharge roles.
 - Development of links with the Council's current supporting independence team based in Building Cleaning Services.
 - Redesigned workflow, with the home improvement and assistance service (or HIA) being the first point of contact, undertaking triage, visits, and assessment, post visit activities, and obtaining customer feedback.
 - A systems-based approach wherever possible to reduce cost, ensure better efficiency and performance.
15. In addition to a new operational model, other key emerging recommendations include:
 - a. The need for robust, timely and accurate performance data and reporting.
 - b. Production of an improvement plan to remove the current backlog of more than 300 cases waiting assessment at the earliest opportunity.
 - c. A review of relevant policies, particularly the Council's home improvement and housing assistance policy, to ensure they are fit for purpose and

maximize the Council's options to support tenants and owners to live independently.

- d. A revamp of current procurement practice and engagement with local SME's and suppliers to increase contractor options moving forward
- e. New IT systems to support service improvement and effective case management.

Resources

- 16. The proposed new 'home improvement and assistance' service (or HIA) would comprise of 22 employees compared with the current adaptations team of 8.2 full time equivalent posts.
- 17. This increase in staff numbers will be met from a mixture of bringing existing staff currently located in different teams across the Council into the new service, as well as additional recruitment.
- 18. Applying the recommendations from Foundations in relation to cost recovery from both the DFG and HRA funded capital programmes for adaptations, together with utilising existing budgets, will ensure that the additional staffing costs are met without any impact on revenue budgets (HRA or General Fund).

Next Steps

- 19. Subject to the support of the HWB, it is intended to present the review proposals and final recommendations for service improvement at the September Cabinet meeting.

Recommendations

- 20. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to consider and support the proposals to establish a new 'home improvement and assistance' service in Gateshead.

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