

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel
MEETING DATE:	18 <sup>th</sup> November 2011
TITLE:	Home Improvement Agency Commission Update
WARD:	ALL
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>	
<b>List of attachments to this report: None</b>	

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This briefing paper aims to update the Panel on the proposal to commission a West of England Home Improvement Agency (HIA) in partnership with South Gloucestershire, North Somerset & Bristol City Councils. The project aims to provide improved value for money and an enhanced service for residents.

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

The Wellbeing Policy Panel is asked to:

- 2.1 Note and comment on the issues raised in this report

### **3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 Bath & North East Somerset currently funds the existing HIA to the value of £115,000 plus £75,581 for the installation of handrails. This is funded by the Supporting People and the Communities commissioning programme. In addition further funding is provided at 10% of contract value where the HIA undertakes contract management of disabled facility grants and other improvements funded through our financial assistance programme. This is funded through Housing Services discretionary housing renewal budget.
- 3.2 There are currently no proposals to reduce funding, however, ultimately this will be a decision by the Supporting People and the Communities Commissioning Board taken in the context of the overall funding for the Supporting People and Communities programme as agreed by the Council.
- 3.3 A project budget of £46,000 has been agreed by the four authorities, with Bristol contributing £28,000. This will cover project management, legal and procurement costs. The remaining £18,000 will be funded by Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire from a surplus in the West of England Housing fund. Bristol City Council (BCC) have agreed to lead the project, including project management and procurement, on behalf of the four authorities.

### **4 THE REPORT**

- 4.1 HIAs help vulnerable people live independently by providing housing related support, such as minor repairs, handyperson services, adaptations and advice. The core customer groups for HIAs are disabled, elderly and otherwise vulnerable households across all tenures, although the focus is on owner occupiers. The service is means tested: provided free to those on benefits with a modest charge levied for those who can pay. HIAs also provide services through self-funding options to non-vulnerable households.
- 4.2 HIAs help meet both local and national strategic aims, such as maximising choice and independence for vulnerable people and promoting the prevention of illness, institutional care and accidents. Thus, HIA services make a significant contribution to reducing public expenditure on acute care.
- 4.3 A sub-regional needs analysis has shown that demand for HIA services will rise due to the ageing population and increasing expectations for quality of life. There will be significant increases in older people with a limiting long-term illness, including dementia, thereby increasing age-related disability.
- 4.4 Following investigative meetings with Foundations<sup>1</sup> the lead housing officers for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire, working with other relevant colleagues, investigated whether the business case supported the joint commissioning of a single HIA service for the West of England sub-region. This is currently possible as all four existing contracts are due for renewal from April 2012. In BANES, the HIA service is provided by Somerset (BANES) Care & Repair. It is run on a three year contract which ends in March 2012. The contract used provides for the ability to extend the contract by 2 years.

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<sup>1</sup> Foundations – Government appointed national body for HIAs. <http://www.foundations.uk.com/>

4.5 The business case highlighted the following key potential benefits for commissioners and service users of operating sub-regionally:

**(1) Financial Benefits**

- a) Savings in procurement costs. With an increasing complex and hostile procurement environment these costs are increasing. By working in partnership with other authorities we can, and do, make significant savings.
- b) Economies of scale in the commissioned service associated with the reduction in back room duplication, particularly around governance, management, IT and other professional support costs.
- c) Reduced contract management costs, through less duplication by the contract and field officers of the 4 authorities.

**(2) Non-Financial Benefits**

- a) A larger contract value is likely to interest more potential providers, thus generating greater competition. The increase in bidders would also improve the sustainability of the sector reducing the likelihood of only a single or even no bidders for a single authority commission.
- b) A larger contract value would provide the economies of scale to develop services which may prove unviable for a single authority.
- c) It is more effective for a single provider to market themselves across the sub-region, particularly given that referrers, such as client's children & siblings may live out of district though within the sub-region.

4.6 Consideration is being given to whether this commission should also include the existing Independent Living Centre (ILC) contract. This is currently located in Fishponds, Bristol and utilised by all four authorities to varying degrees. ILCs help disabled people improve their mobility through the "hands-on" demonstration of products and equipment that can help them in their daily lives. ILCs can also be used as one-stop assessment centres, combining HIA services and product testing with a local authority's statutory responsibilities for adaptations. This is an aspect which is proving potentially attractive to our West of England partners. However, given our limited contribution to the ILC funding (5% of sub-regional funding) this is not at present a high priority. However, this could present service development opportunities for the future.

4.7 The successful provider will be expected to offer authorities a range of services including:

- (1) information and advice, particularly around housing options for older people;
- (2) casework, advocacy and support;
- (3) home safety assessments;
- (4) hospital discharge and reablement services;
- (5) independent living centre services, including product and equipment testing;

- (6) possibly independent living centre assessment facilities;
- (7) co-ordination and technical support for repairs, maintenance, adaptations and improvements;
- (8) handyman repairs, maintenance and security improvements.

4.8 Each local authority will identify at the outset the particular services that it wishes to buy throughout the contract. The contract will work flexibly to allow local authorities to take up unpurchased services in future.

4.9 A project communication plan has been developed which includes a twelve week consultation period which started on the 5<sup>th</sup> October. The consultation has been developed to ensure compliance with the various local authority voluntary sector compacts. The consultation feedback will be used to draw up the tender specification. The consultation is extensive and includes the following components:

- (1) Commissioning strategy and equality impact assessment has been made public. A copy of this document can be downloaded or viewed using the web links on Housing Services webpage on the Council's website;
- (2) Separate feedback forms for service users, partners and potential providers have been made available. These can be completed quickly and simply online or hard copies can be made available on request. Again the details are available on Housing Services main external webpage;
- (3) Past and current HIA service user will be contacted inviting them to contribute to the survey;
- (4) There will be "drop in" local stakeholder events in all four authorities.
- (5) A single market providers' day consultation event for potential contract bidders has been organised for Monday 7th November 2011.

4.10 Local sign off will need to be sought at the end of January. The nature of the sign off varies according to authority. In Bath & North East Somerset this is through the Supporting People & Communities Commissioning Body. The full OJEU compliant restricted tender will then be advertised at the beginning of February with a contract award anticipated in by mid-June 2012.

## **5 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken.

## **7 EQUALITIES**

7.1 An equalities impact assessment has been completed on the proposal. This is contained in the Commissioning Strategy which can be downloaded or viewed using the web links on Housing Services main webpage on the Council's website. However, the core objective of this proposal is to improve the housing & health conditions of low-income, elderly and disabled residents living in substandard or inadequate housing and thus address the current adverse impact on these two groups. In addition the project aims to provide improved value for money and an enhanced service for these vulnerable groups.

## 8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The proposal is undergoing extensive consultation as detailed above in paragraph 4.10.

## 9 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

9.1 Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Sustainability; Human Rights; Corporate; Other Legal Considerations

## 10 ADVICE SOUGHT

10.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

<b>Contact person</b>	Graham Sabourn, Associate Director (Housing Services)
<b>Background papers</b>	None
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	