

# **Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of Report: July 2009**

**Portfolio: Housing – Councillor David Stallan**



**Subject: C.A.R.E. (Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest) Handyperson Scheme**

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**Committee Secretary:** Adrian Hendry, ext.4246

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## **Recommendations/ Decision required:**

**To consider and comment on the recommendations to change the eligibility criteria of the Handyperson Service and make any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder on the service to be provided.**

## **Background**

1. The Handyperson Service is funded jointly between Essex County Council's Adult Social Care and Community Wellbeing (ASC&CW), who currently contribute £11,417 towards the administration of the scheme, and Epping Forest District Council who pay for the work. The Council's current budget for Handyperson Service work is £12,250.
2. The scheme is run and managed within the remit of services provided by C.A.R.E. and has been operating with the same budget and eligibility criteria since 2003. The eligibility criteria for the Scheme are attached as an Appendix to this report.
3. At present, Clients receive the Handyperson Service free of charge and can have work undertaken up to a maximum of £150 provided they are on a means tested benefit. Those not receiving benefit pay in full for the work. They can only use the service once in any one calendar year. Local private contractors from C.A.R.E.'s Preferred Contractors List carry out the works agreed.
4. Under the Handyperson Scheme clients can benefit from the following works:
  - Installation of grab rails and handrails;
  - Provision of falls prevention work;
  - Provision of equipment through the (ASC&CW);
  - Carry out minor repairs, such as carpentry work, and adaptations that are necessary to assist in maintaining independent living within the scope of the Service.
5. As a result of client high demand for the service, in 2006 consideration was given to introducing a voluntary contribution scheme. However, it was decided that this would not be cost-effective to meet the current demand, given the resources available to process the work.

## The Context within Essex

6. There are 13 Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) in Essex divided along the District Council boundaries. These are currently managed by six different managing agents. C.A.R.E. is the only HIA that is District Council run apart from Uttlesford District Council. C.A.R.E is also the only HIA that uses external contractors to undertake Handyperson works.

Listed in the table below are examples of Handyperson Charges in the rest of the County.

| Authority  | Charges   |
|--|---|
| Castle Point, Thurrock, and Basildon District Councils | £7 per hour   |
| Uttlesford District Council                            | A system of donations exists and the use of external contractors. |
| Southend Borough Council                               | £15 per hour plus materials                                       |
| Maldon District Council                                | £8 per hour plus materials  |
| Chelmsford Borough Council                             | £8 per hour plus materials and max of 3 hours                     |
| Colchester Borough Council                             | £7 per hour plus materials  |
| Tendring District Council                              | £10 per hour plus materials                                       |
| Harlow District Council                                | £10 per hour and max of 3 hours plus materials                    |

7. The qualifying criteria across all Authorities and this Council are as follows:

- Clients must be over 60 years of age;
- Clients must be registered disabled;
- Clients must be on a means tested benefit;
- The Scheme is available to private tenants and home owners.

## Gardening and Home Safety Services

8. A number of other HIAs offer services not provided through C.A.R.E., such as gardening and home safety schemes. A gardening service is currently being provided through Voluntary Action EF. A home safety scheme is provided through the Epping Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, in conjunction with Help the Aged and it would not be an effective use of C.A.R.E.'s limited resources, therefore, to provide these. However, C.A.R.E. caseworkers carefully assess whether these services are appropriate for individual clients and have an efficient signposting. In the future, should partner organisations become unable to continue to offer these services, consideration would be given as to whether C.A.R.E. could provide them.

## Handyperson activity and demand

9. Below are 3 tables which show jobs completed, falls prevention equipment installed and the amount of budget spent. Table A and B represent years 2007 and 2008. Table C shows the first quarter for 2009. In this period there have been a total of 48 enquires recorded, of which 32 have been signposted to external providers.

| (A) Handyperson Service 2007-08                  | Number     | Amount<br>£   |
|--|------------|---------------|
| Handyperson (number of jobs)                     | 92         | 9,430         |
| Falls Prevention (pieces of equipment installed) | 14         | 1,890         |
| <b>Total</b>                                     | <b>106</b> | <b>11,320</b> |

| <b>(B) Handyperson Service 2008-09</b>           | <b>Number</b> | <b>Amount<br/>£</b> |
|--|---------------|---------------------|
| Handyperson (number of jobs)                     | 81            | 6,957               |
| Falls Prevention (pieces of equipment installed) | 10            | 1,183               |
| <b>Total</b>                                     | <b>91</b>     | <b>8,140</b>        |

| <b>(C) Handyperson Service Q1 2009-10</b>        | <b>Number</b> | <b>Amount<br/>£</b> |
|--|---------------|---------------------|
| Handyperson (number of jobs)                     | 15            | 1557                |
| Falls Prevention (pieces of equipment installed) | 1             | 340                 |
| <b>Total</b>                                     | <b>16</b>     | <b>1897</b>         |

10. Using a snapshot of the last 2 years of the service, it can be seen that the take up has decreased and the allocated budget has been under spent. Using Table C as an indicator, projections for the first quarter of this financial year might suggest that this trend will continue, which presents some concern. However, it should be noted that take-up generally increases within the late autumn and winter months.

11. The Service is well respected and enjoys a favourable public profile within the District. However, despite enquiries for the service remaining high, it appears that potential users may have sought alternative providers or, more worryingly, have settled for jobs to be left outstanding. A suggested reason for this is that the limited funds available are not in keeping with contractors prices and, therefore, the client's needs cannot be met within the current cost limits.

12. The funding maximum of £150.00 has not increased since 2003 but labour and material costs have spiralled in that time. Reliable local contractors are becoming harder to find and, understandably, finding it too time consuming and not cost effective to undertake works of less than £150.00.

13. In addition, although many jobs required by the older and vulnerable person fall just outside the existing definitions of a Handyperson job, they don't fall within the criteria for a Council grant. Clients may not be able, therefore, to afford to pay for work which may be of a preventative nature.

#### **14. Recommendations:**

(i) That the number of jobs that can be carried out be increased to a maximum of 3 times a year with applications being at least 3 months apart;

(ii) That the cost limit is increased to a maximum of £250 in any application but no more than £400 be allowed in any one year;

(iii) That the remit of qualifying works be extended to:

- Plumbing (e.g. tap washers, toilet cisterns, ball valves, overflow, provision of lever taps);
- Remedial carpentry;
- Minor electrical works (Renewing light bulbs, fitting battery operated smoke detectors);
- Glazing;
- Security works (window/door locks);
- Curtain rails;
- Minor tiling;

- Falls Prevention and safety works (fixing carpets, lowering cupboards, putting up shelves);
- Small roof and guttering jobs that can be carried out within the cost limits, bearing in mind Health and Safety considerations;
- Small works to assist in the early release from hospital (although within the scope of the Service it may not be possible to carry out emergency works).

(iv) That following works be excluded from the Scheme:

- Decorations;
- Work to gas installations;
- Fencing;
- Electrical appliances (e.g. kettles, cookers);
- Gardening (except clearing paths for access where safety is a consideration);
- Window cleaning;
- Roofs and guttering works involving scaffolding or extensive Health and Safety measures;
- Small works to common parts (except in exceptional circumstances where permission is given by the freeholder)

15. The service remains popular but recent uptake suggests that existing criteria may make the scheme slightly prohibitive. Widening the net of eligible works and being more flexible with funding may engage more users and make greater use of the annual funding provided. The increased funding should also encourage local contractors to want to undertake more regular and lucrative small jobs within the District. Furthermore, the extra funding would provide greater scope for the client and promote a more holistic approach.

16. Using the service up to 3 times a year will enable more jobs to be done and ensure a feeling of independence, pride of place and security is maintained. This also creates a perception of wellbeing and comfort in the knowledge that there is a point of contact and future concerns may be addressed. However, having a 3 month gap between jobs and a ceiling of £400 in any one year provides suitable boundaries to ensure applicants do not become too creative with their enquiries and demands.

17. Should the agreement be given to the change in eligibility criteria, these would be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that the budget is not overstretched. In addition, a report would be submitted to each C.A.R.E Advisory Panel to demonstrate whether the change was having the desired effect. It is recognised that future publicity will be required to highlight the change in policy and to draw attention of potential service users.

## **Consultation**

18. The Private Housing Manager (Grants & C.A.R.E) meets on a quarterly basis with the C.A.R.E Advisory Panel to discuss performance and matters relating to service delivery. The Panel met on 9 July 2009 and the above recommendations were presented for consultation. The Panel raised no objections and no comments were recorded.

19. The recommendations were also presented for consultation to the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation on 14 July 2009. The Federation raised no objections but made the following comments:

- That the use of the word 'C.A.R.E' could be off putting to potential service users in any publicity;
- To include one off minor gardening works.

The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to receive such recommendations and make any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder on the proposed service.