

REPORT TO: CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING, 17 MARCH 2009

REPORT BY: ALAN CUFLEY HEAD OF COMMUNITY HOUSING

WRITTEN BY: ROY SCANLON, Housing Renewals Manager

SUBJECT: INTRODUCTION OF A HANDYPERSON SCHEME

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To seek the approval of the Cabinet Member for the introduction of a Handyman service.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Cabinet Member supports the expression of interest submitted by the SP Commissioning Body

2.2 That the Cabinet Member approves the introduction of a city council Handyman service,

3. BACKGROUND

Homecheck has been providing home safety and electrical checks for vulnerable people in Portsmouth for many years. The service has evolved over the years to include minor adaptations work for disabled people. During the last couple of years the Homecheck team have provided cover for the delivery of the Occupational Therapy Technician Service, installing stair rails and grab rails, and now install sensory impairment equipment for Social Services.

In the course of delivering these services it has become apparent that there are many vulnerable residents who find difficulty in getting help with small repairs and DIY type tasks such as putting up curtain tracks, changing light bulbs, assembling flat pack furniture etc. Discussions with the Independent Living service has confirmed the difficulties in finding people to carry out this type of work and similar small tasks for their clients.

Age Concern provide a valuable handyman service run by volunteer workers with Social Care providing funding towards a part time co-ordinator for the scheme. The demand for help extends beyond the scope and skill set of the current volunteers and leaves potentially vulnerable people without assistance and needing to find a suitable person to carry out work for them. These small items of work are of little interest to building trades people as there is no profit in this type of work.

4. CURRENT POSITION

Communities and Local Government (CLG) commissioned research that shows that an effective Handyperson service can maintain the independence of older people and increase the period of time that they can remain in their own homes. Some local authorities already enable Handyperson services, run by the Home Improvement Agency network and funded with Supporting People funds, to beneficial effect. The CLG would like to see this expanded to all areas.

To promote this expansion, the CLG has proposed to make grants available to local authorities, via the Supporting People programme, to establish or enhance Handyperson schemes and invited expressions of interest. For Portsmouth the indicative figures for 2009/10 and 2010/11 are £50,000 and £70,000 respectively.

An expression of interest was submitted and endorsed by the Chair of Supporting People Commissioning Body in association with the city council's Home Improvement Agency service and on the 26 February 2009 the CLG confirmed the allocation of funding.

5. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSALS

Having its own Home Improvement Agency Service and the Homecheck service the council is well placed to provide a Handyperson service within the city drawing on its existing skill set to add to the existing Age Concern scheme offered by their volunteers. The proposal is to set up a complementary scheme in conjunction with Age Concern. The funding would be top sliced to enable Age Concern to establish a full time coordinator for the scheme with referrals to the council's Handyperson service for tasks outside the scope of their workforce. The service would also be available for direct referrals from the Independent Living Service.

A review of the CLG brief for the handyperson service indicates that our existing Homecheck service already provides some of the elements they require to be provided. The council's new Handyperson would therefore form part of the Homecheck team and be able to draw on the range of skills available there. In addition residents using the Handyperson service would have the re-assurance that their work was being carried out by CRB checked technicians.

It is envisaged that for most small repairs and adaptations there would be no labour cost to vulnerable people, just a requirement to pay for materials. Vulnerable residents are generally those households where the occupants are in receipt of an income relate benefit and have an occupant over 60, an occupant with a disability or young children. Subject to demand a low cost option for older persons not on a benefit could be introduced subject to a further report.

6. FINANCE

It is viewed that the proposal would be cost neutral to the council. Changes to the existing external contracts being serviced by Homecheck technicians are being varied and the resources necessary to provide the Handyman Service will become available. As funding is only confirmed for two years, until the end of March 2011, any future commitment to the delivery of an enhanced service will be a consideration for the LSP along with other Supported People services funded from the Artea Based Grant.

7. CONCLUSION

The introduction of this new service provision would provide the opportunity to form a partnership with the voluntary sector and enable vulnerable residents to access a Handyperson service to carry out small works and adaptation and contribute to their safety, independence and ability to remain in their own home.

8. CITY SOLICITOR’S COMMENTS / EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The City Solicitor is satisfied that it is within the Cabinet Member’s powers to approve the recommendations as set out.

A preliminary Equalities Impact assessment has been carried out.

9. SIGNING OFF THE REPORT

Signed.....

Alan Cufley
Head of Community Housing

Dated.....

8. APPROVAL TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out above were approved / approved as amended / deferred / rejected by the Cabinet Member for Housing, on.....

Signed.....

Councillor Steve Wylie
Cabinet Member - Housing