

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

DATE: 25th February 2021

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WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

THE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

1. **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of the report is to summarise the changes and progress arising out of the report presented to Scrutiny on 24th June 2019.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

That the Panel considers and comments on the contents of the report and progress made.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA, Five Year Plan and Housing Strategy**

The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy,

3.1 Integration; Strong, Healthy and Attractive Neighbourhoods

Increase healthy life expectancy in Slough, by increasing the proportion of people living independently at home; and increase the number of people managing their own care and support needs.

Developing a place-based health and care strategy; building on the work of the Slough Better Care Fund through increasing contributions from health and social care to the pooled budget; increasing health and social care partners to work together.

Quality of the built environment provides a strong link to housing, through increasing levels of resident satisfaction with the local place, improving levels of happiness; and improving life chances.

3.2 **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

This report and the work of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) touch four of the priority outcomes: -

- Outcome 1: Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful;
Outcome 2: Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs;
Outcome 3: Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay and
Outcome 4: Our residents will live in good quality homes

The main purpose of this area of work is to enable people with disabilities to remain in their home and only in the most challenging cases to move to an adapted property or one that could be adapted.

3.3 Housing Strategy

Slough's Housing Strategy sets out the council's shared vision and priorities to provide sufficient, good quality, affordable housing including those for people with disabilities.

4. Other Implications

(a) Financial

The HIA has an HRA Capital budget of £250,000 to provide a variety of adaptations for council tenants and £550,000 funding from the Better Care Fund for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) for private sector residents. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

(b) Risk Management

There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 states that 'a housing authority shall not approve an application for a grant unless they are satisfied that the works are necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person' and 'that it is reasonable and practical to carry out the relevant works having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling, qualifying houseboat, qualifying park home or building'.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

The Council has a public sector duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation in order to promote equality of opportunity to all persons and to those who share a protected characteristic under the legislation. Disability is one of the Protected Characteristics.

An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 2.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 A report to Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel was considered on 24th June 2019. It gave a background to the HIA for information Appendix 1. This report is to provide an update on progress arising from that original report. Within the body of the 24th June report, it was noted that Officers

were discussing a consultation brief to review the HIA service. The review would look at the whole process and propose changes.

- 5.2 It was noted that the review work was important, as the HIA performs a valuable service for the community and enables vulnerable adults and children to remain at home with a degree of dignity.
- 5.3 The report conclusions were:
 - 5.3.1 The HIA is an important team in delivering adaptations for people with disabilities. However, the wider team of social workers, occupational therapists, private contractors and Osborne, the Council's contractor, all work together to make this all possible. Whilst overall works take too long and officers are looking at this issue, the valuable work, at the end of the day must not be underestimated.
 - 5.3.2 The review work, which will be undertaken will be an important intervention on the road to improving outcomes for those who rely on aids to help them in their day-to-day lives.
- 5.4 Subsequently, an independent audit was commissioned by the Council, to improve outcomes due to concerns about current delivery. This included - lengthy waiting times; protracted processes and tension between housing and social care; communication with service users and departments within the Council; innovation and creativity; and value for money, customer experience and team resilience. The audit was to identify the use of DFG and to assess the potential for alternative use to improve customer experience and provide value for money.
- 5.5 Foundations were appointed. They are the National Body for Home Improvement Agencies in England. Established in 2000 to oversee a national network of nearly 200 home improvement agencies (HIAs) and handyperson providers across the country. Since 2015 they have also been supporting local authorities to improve how they deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). They have the knowledge, experience and expertise to carryout such an audit.
- 5.6 Foundations' work was carried out between October 2019 and January 2020. It involved interviews with a range of council staff across departments; review of existing policies and procedures and budget arrangements.
- 5.7 Their report contained the response to their audit of the in-house home improvement agency (HIA) and its delivery of the local DFG programme. There were seven key deliverables for the project: -
 - Review the team and how they operate against market comparators
 - Compliance with relevant policies, procedures, and regulations
 - Review the administration of the scheme
 - Review the budget needed to operate the service
 - Identify third party service level agreements /contracts and protocols/frameworks
 - Review current performance management framework in place and propose a new framework
 - Identify opportunities to further extend DFG to meet the objectives of improving patient flows

- 5.8 Whilst the audit was principally focussed on DFG delivery, it included reviewing how aids and adaptations using HRA Capital Funding, were provided for council tenants.
- 5.9 Audit Recommendations:
- 5.9.1 Review the team and examine how they operate against market comparators
- It is therefore recommended that adaptations within the Council stock be delivered by Neighbourhood Services in future potentially through the term contractor, Osbornes, and that all other adaptations remain with the HIA team.
 - It is further recommended that the HIA team be transferred to the Adult Care Directorate and placed under the management of the OT Team Leader.
 - Safeguards should be in place to ensure that any change in structure should be inclusive and not further exacerbate the situation (i.e. the further alienation of the Children's OT).
 - the role of the (HIA)Team Leader should be reviewed. We suggest that it should concentrate on monitoring and performance of the service.
 - The current surveying/technical capacity (within the HIA) should be reviewed so that it concentrates on the provision of expert advice rather than routine administrative tasks. The remaining capacity within the team should provide administrative support to surveyors, contractors, and clients; and casework support for more vulnerable clients.
 - A preliminary means-test of all potential clients should be carried out at the first point of contact with the Council even before an OT assessment is carried out.
- 5.10 Audit compliance with relevant policies, procedures and regulations
- Existing policies, protocols and rules should be applied consistently and the HIA team within the context of their co-location with the OT Team should be performance managed against those working practices. This should be the primary concern and role of the HIA Team Leader.
- 5.11 Review the administration of the scheme
- It is recommended that the profile of housing and the DFG be raised and that regular reporting of the programme be made to the Better Care Fund through the Health & Well-Being Board.
 - It is recommended that the Older Persons Housing Strategy continue to be developed and consulted upon and that routine feedback be obtained from those approaching the Council for help and support with their home environment.
 - It is recommended that a copy of the RRO Housing Assistance Policy be published alongside other information on adapting or improving your home on the Council's website
 - It is recommended that the availability of related services be made known to the those working within the HIA, and that effective working relationships be established between all parties. A 'Healthy Homes' assessment type approach should be adopted with referrals into associated services.
 - It is recommended that the RRO policy be urgently reviewed and that priorities be determined for spending the DFG allocation to best support the priorities of the Better Care Fund.
 - It is recommended that support to move in the limited number of cases for which it would be suitable (as opposed to the provision of a DFG) is re-examined so that the purposes and implementation are understood and applied consistently.

And that the availability of such support be publicised for all tenures, not only Council stock, to the public and to professionals working in the public sector.

5.12 Review the budget needed to operate the service

- A new performance framework (for the HIA) with KPIs relating to end-to-end completion times, client satisfaction, contractor performance, drop-out rates and other outcomes should be devised to scrutinise the different types of projects routinely undertaken. This should include ramps, stairlifts, bathroom adaptations, and extensions (or complex packages of adaptations).

5.13 Review current performance management framework in place and propose a new framework

- All records in future should be kept electronically with case records kept up to date and all activity recorded contemporaneously by staff. This will require an investment in training and possibly equipment, as well as the implementation of a meaningful performance framework.
- Any new database for DFGs should be accessible by those carrying out assessments as well as those procuring works. There should be pre-determined case types agreed such as advice and information, each with an associated workflow.
- Regular management reports should be set up populated by information from within the database and these should be used to manage both team and individual performance.
- There should be regular team meetings (at least bi-weekly) to discuss progress on cases. Thus, cases will not be allowed to stagnate. Protocols should be agreed to handle (and close) cases that are not progressing within the pre-determined timescales.
- Individual performance should be by way of regular (monthly) 1:1 meetings with formal notes and agreed targets relating to caseload, case progression, client satisfaction and other competencies.
- Other management reports should be established to regularly update senior management on numbers of open cases, proportion of budget committed and spent, types of adaptations being carried out and average cost, etc.
- Feedback should be requested from clients at the conclusion of every case with feedback used to provide evidence of where improvements are required.
- Once an adaptation is completed a review of the client's care package should be triggered.
- There should be some means of tracking and measuring a client's entire journey. This may require the amalgamation of records from separate databases and may be helped by using their NHS record in all parts of the system.

6. **Comments of Other Committees**

6.1 There are no comments from any other Committees.

7. **Conclusion**

7.1 The Foundations report and recommendations have been reflected in the Council's Transformation programme that is currently being implemented. As a result, the HIA will move across to Adult Social Care into the Operations Short Term Services area, and will be called "Independent Living". The Occupational Therapist service is also in the Operations Short Term Services area, which will enable close working between both operational areas.

7.2 It is anticipated that the HIA will transition across to Adult Social Care ready for 1st April 2021. During this period, the Housing Development and Contracts Service which manages the RMI Contract, will develop a service level agreement with the ASC Operations – Short Term Service area, to deliver through Osborne an increasing amount of aids and adaptation work, principally for housing tenants, but at a later date, delivering DFG work.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – HIA Background

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Statement

9. **Background Papers**

There are no background papers.