

COP/01/12

Policy & Scrutiny Committee Community and Older People

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Purpose of Report

To highlight the role of Home Improvement Agencies (HIA) in the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG).

General Background

Following a tender exercise, Essex has had two HIA providers in place since June 2011 - Papworth and Swan. A separate arrangement applies in Epping Forest District where there is an in-house HIA service.

All three deliver against a common specification that includes the provision of Information, Advice and Support; Handyperson Services and 'Preventative' Gardening work alongside DFG delivery. The specification was drawn up with input from Foundations – the national umbrella organisation for HIA – to reflect current best practice.

Historically, HIAs were funded in partnership between ECC, Supporting People and District partners. However, there was little consistency of approach and when the services came to be re-commissioned, there was not a consensus across districts partners as to what (if anything) they required from an HIA. Financial pressures meant that there was also uncertainty as to whether partners could commit to ongoing funding.

To allow for local flexibility and to focus on those elements of most interest to ECC, a service was commissioned to cover the following elements - handyperson; information and advice; and **limited support** for the most complex DFGs. Historically, ECC were putting in significant amounts of funding to facilitate the districts delivering lower-level DFGs which were unlikely to be of benefit to Adult Social Care service users.

A flexible contracting arrangement means that the districts can now avail themselves of the HIAs to deliver DFG or continue with in-house arrangements, e.g. as Basildon does. This means there does not need to be separate tendering exercise.

The current contracts expire at the end of May 2013. Early in the New Year, work will commence to consider the approach that should be taken to re-commissioning, as part of the wider prevention programme to support people to remain independent.

Simon Harniess

21st December 2011