

Pre-Scrutiny Questions and Answers – Overview & Scrutiny Agenda 5 December 2023

Report Title: HEART

Report Author(s): Lisa Barker

Councillor Armstrong:

1. Parts 4.3 and 4.4 of the report say that all grant income goes to HEART, but then that adaptations are funded by the HRA. Why isn't HEART funding the adaptations if they receive all the government allocation, or am I misunderstanding the finance? I did note a 171k spend on HEART in the Q2 budget statement.

Response:

Government policy is for DFG to pay for all tenures except for Council Housing which must be paid for from the Housing Revenue Account i.e., with Tenants rents paying for the adaptations.

2. Is the required data to show we are satisfying our legal obligation here held or accessible by WDC? Given the recent regulations issues/self-referral, I'm keen to know that the data isn't held exclusively by HEART and not accessible to us.

Response:

HEART holds the data however, HEART is a shared service and not a contracted service, with a WDC employee within the team and therefore, the data is accessible.

3. Appendix 2 p11 mentions a concerning low take up of grants by WDC in comparison to the other HEART areas. Has this issue resolved, and if not do we have an idea as to the reasons behind it?

Response:

This is an ongoing issue, primarily driven by the Warwick districts being affluent and therefore being required to self-fund adaptations once the needs assessment is applied.

Councillor Russell:

In line 6.5 it states that the Annual Report was to be received in October. Can you confirm that this was in fact received?

Response:

Yes, it was received and is attached to the report at Appendix 2

Councillor Milton:

Thanks for your report to O&S on HEART. It's good to see that from the impression the report gives that the service appears to be in much better shape than it has been previously. Thank you to everyone involved for their efforts.

One comment on the report and a couple of questions.

In the Annual Report it would be good in future if the measures in the pie charts on performance could be aligned so that we can see the before and after picture more clearly. From reviewing them it looks in general that the story is one of positive impact. However, it is difficult to easily reconcile them with each other. I think doing this would also help us to better assess the value add that the service is delivering.

A few questions which I'd be happy to discuss on Tuesday:

In the introduction to the report the increased demand, vacancies etc is flagged as having an impact on waiting lists. It would be good if you could highlight to the committee on Tuesday what the current state of the waiting lists is and also the action plan that is in place to manage those risks so that we don't end up back where we were previously.

I'm also pleased to see that there are a number of metrics where we are performing better than the national average.

Is that the target that we've set ourselves (i.e., to be better than average)?

Is the intention to remain better than average?

Is there a delta that we've set? e.g., we always want to be 20% better than the national average?

Response:

Thank you for your email. I have passed your questions to the HEART team so that they are prepared for tomorrow evening.

Councillor R Dickson:

Thanks, Lisa, for this comprehensive report with its appendices.

It's appreciated that compared to other parts of the county, WDC's use of the DFG facility is lower in nominal terms (e.g., £6,264 in WDC vs av Heart cost £8,832) although it would be useful to know how this compares as a proportion of the vulnerable people living in eligible accommodation.

Response:

Eligible accommodation consists of dwellings in the private sector (owner-occupied and rented) and Housing Association stock. There is no single source of statistics that measures 'vulnerability' and indeed not all vulnerable people require a DFG. Each DFG requirement is assessed by a suitably qualified person and is bespoke to the individual.

Unless I'm misreading this (quite possible), the average end-to-end delivery for DFG works in Warwick district is still more than six months (197 calendar days). I can imagine that for a resident awaiting improvements this can be very frustrating. The completion times, whilst still better than the national average, appear static and not yet back to pre-Covid levels?

Response:

The service has had high levels of enquiries and has struggled resource wise which has led to longer processing times. Whilst capital funding has increased generously over the years the revenue funding for staff has been a challenge. With the agreement of the hosts section 151 officer, a different method of funding has been proposed by the service and HEART will recruit new team members to increase throughput for a period of 2 years. If demand remains constant this should improve delivery times over this period.

When is it recommended that a further report be produced for O&S to report on the success of continuous improvement measures at Heart to drive down the completion time figure of 52.9 working days reported for 2022/23.

Response:

An annual update report would seem a sensible approach.

Councillor K Dickson:

It is good to see there are positive reports regarding the HEART services. However, we are still hearing of customer's frustrations with the service, including difficulties with communications.

I see that a significant proportion (23%) of cancellations of works, is due to "no further contact from applicant". Is there any information as to whether multiple applications are made by an applicant who may not be satisfied from a first application? I wonder whether some of these applicants may feel lost in the system and so are unaware that they need to contact HEART again, are they waiting for HEART to contact them?

Response:

The HEART team advise that this information is not readily to hand and that they would need to undertake further work for the answer. I have asked them to look into doing so. They said 'We do call back customers at least 3 times and then send a letter giving 14 days to respond before we close the case. If they do respond after that date, then we will re-open the case if it is the same as the originally enquiry.

This generally happens at enquiry stage before a personal assessment has been carried out and so there is generally no application or works being carried out when this cancellation reason is recorded.'

The timeframe for work to be done, does still appear to be very long. How much does this affect the number of WDC properties left vacant as they are not yet ready for vulnerable residents?

Response:

It does not affect WDC properties at all as works to these properties are undertaken by WDC.